

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

June 9, 2003

Bursting Bubbles

Why the economy
will go from
bad to worse

By Dean Baker



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Editorial

The War at Home

This lull between the war in Iraq and whatever adventure the Bush neocons next drag us into provides an opportunity to focus on the war at home.

The battlefield is mapped: tax cuts, military spending, environmental deregulation, booming prisons, a health care crisis, curtailed liberties ...

It is a first step to demonstrate on a weekend afternoon, directing anger and ridicule at an emperor who would be naked were it not for media costume managers. But where do we go from there?

The Democratic primaries are one place to begin. Candidates who opposed the war, including Howard Dean, Dennis Kucinich, Carol Mosely Braun and Al Sharpton, should be supported. Kucinich, while great on the issues, has failed to inspire with lackluster debate appearances. No one I know supports former Sen. Mosley Braun, who has burned bridges to her once fervent supporters. Sharpton carries the burden, fairly or not, of having promoted Tawana Brawley's lies. Which leaves Dean. Straight-talking, progressive and personable, he is a candidate who could galvanize the progressive electorate.

The Democratic primaries are the one national venue where progressives can put their issues on the nation's agenda. Imagine if Ralph Nader had challenged Al Gore's centrism in the Democratic primaries in 2000. For the first time in years, Americans would have been exposed to a debate around a common-sense progressive agenda.

But while the primaries have potential, any organizing done around Democratic candidates must dovetail with efforts to build lasting electoral organizations at the local, state and congressional district levels. Models for this exist in Minnesota, where the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party is supplemented by a statewide coalition, Progressive Minnesota, and is pressured by a vibrant Green Party of Minnesota. In Massachusetts, the state's Neighbor to Neighbor organization has made itself a key player in several congressional districts. And rumors are floating that Robert Reich, Clinton's labor secretary and a 2002 gubernatorial candidate, is organizing a Massachusetts-wide progressive Democratic organization.

Such strategies face several obstacles.

Few models for effective party organization exist. In Europe, ideologically based political

parties are integrated into civil society and connect the individual to electoral politics. In the United States, the Democratic Party has for the past 25 years eschewed popular participation in favor of an oligarchy of office holders, rich donors and corporate contributors. The result: the Democratic Leadership Council, an organization whose political philosophy is sustained not by a principled winning strategy, but by the fact that it has the financial (corporate) clout to confer electoral success or failure, and thus set the Democratic agenda.

This lack of effective democratic political parties is compounded by a progressive movement that has evolved into a feudal system that makes coalition-building difficult. In effect, national organizations pursue narrow single-issue mandates under the leadership of executive directors who have an interest in consolidating their organizational fiefdoms and guarding their foundation funding base. Coalition efforts thus threaten them on both counts. Further, like the Democratic Party, most of these organizations are not accountable to their members, if they have them. (The Sierra Club stands out as a notable exception.)

Finally, we are plagued by an electoral structure that is crippled by two defects. First, a campaign finance system that lets anyone

**The battlefield is mapped:
tax cuts, military spending,
environmental deregulation,
booming prisons, a health care
crisis, curtailed liberties ...**

run for office but ensures that only candidates who can raise big money will be taken seriously. Proposals for publicly funded elections being promoted at the state level by Public Campaign (www.publiccampaign.org) address this inequity. Second, our winner-take-all system of electing leaders disenfranchises those who don't vote with the majority. Systems of proportional representation, which ensure that minority viewpoints gain representation, as championed by the Center for Voting and Democracy (www.fairvote.org), would solve this problem.

Those are the obstacles, but with collective effort and smart organizing, they are not insurmountable.

—Joel Bleifuss

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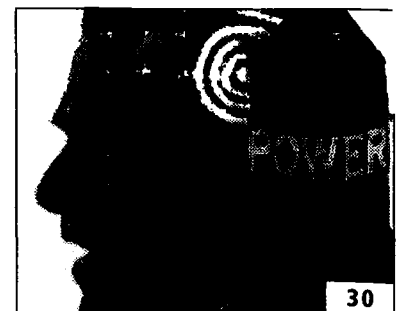
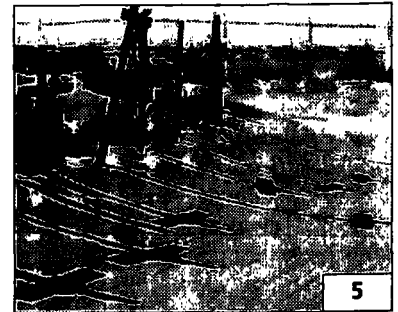
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Ignoring Palestinian Rights

The death of International Solidarity Movement (ISM) volunteer Rachel Corrie on March 16 at the hands of Israeli occupation forces saddened me deeply. And as a Jewish-American active in support of Palestinian human rights, I was angered by the response of mainstream media to her death. That coverage failed to focus on the systematic violation of Palestinian human rights—Rachel's motivation for being an ISM volunteer in the West Bank in the first place.

Instead the coverage seemed to hold Rachel, rather than occupation forces, responsible for her death. Mainstream media furthered the injustice by portraying Rachel as incompetent, while not holding the U.S. responsible for vetoing requests for professional (U.N.) observation units. Such reporting and news analysis confirms the need for publications like *In These Times*.

As an ISM volunteer myself, I believe that I have some very compelling stories to tell about the violations of Palestinian human rights that I have personally witnessed. Unfortunately, I have been repeatedly denied opportunities to share those stories with the organized Jewish community in Ann Arbor and elsewhere. I believe that is because the mainstream media's account of the conflict confirms the pro-Israel bias of many Jewish-Americans who would otherwise be more receptive to the truth about the victimization of Palestinians.

Only *In These Times* and other progressive publications can set the record straight. I know there are lots of other stories to tell, but I implore you to pick up the pace and give your readers more stories about the Israeli occupation and the systematic violation of Palestinian human rights.

Henry Herskovitz
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Power of the People

Pat Aufderheide's point that developing a media democracy movement is not likely is well taken ("The Holy Grail," April 14). Unfortunately, what appears to be her alternative proposal, think tanks, litigation and lobbying—that is, "inside the beltway" maneuvering—is simply a dead end.

As a lawyer, I would be the last to deny that these instruments can be of use. However, their utility is predicated on social force. The U.S. Supreme Court that sanctified American apartheid in *Plessy v. Ferguson* did not reverse itself 60 years later in *Brown v. Board of*

Education simply because of Thurgood Marshall's undoubted eloquence as an advocate. The social movement attacking the bankruptcy of Jim Crow was its essential precondition. Neither did George Bush, 36 years later, prevail over Michael Dukakis because of conservative think tanks and their plethora of "new ideas." I submit Willy Horton, masterful exploitation of old-fashioned racism, and the dissipation of the social movement that led to *Brown v. Board of Education* as the better explanation for the outcome of that election—as well as the rush to the center in the Democratic Party that yielded the silly Dukakis candidacy in the first place.

Bob McChesney and those arguing for a media democracy movement are clearly going against the odds. Nonetheless, I think it better to attempt the difficult rather than ignore the crushing evidence that material success is unobtainable by any other means.

Randy Baker
Seattle

Pat Aufderheide responds: Randy Baker makes the excellent point that policies without clout make no difference. This is precisely why all the "inside the beltway" efforts I have participated in depended on mobilized constituencies.

This is also where I learned the hard lessons I recounted. This is why I think it's so important for future efforts to 1) learn from the past and 2) acknowledge and work with current efforts to do precisely this mobilizing (which include the beltway groups I mentioned).

Lincoln, Revised

With President George W. Bush advocating his tax cuts for the wealthy, his vice president's cozying up to the oil companies and his plans to give the rebuilding of Iraq to Halliburton, Bechtel and other favored companies, maybe we should rephrase Lincoln's famous phrase to "government of the cronies, by the cronies, and for the cronies."

Frank Schneider
Chicago

From Our Web Forums: A Constitutional Amendment

Read more comments like these at www.inthesetimes.com

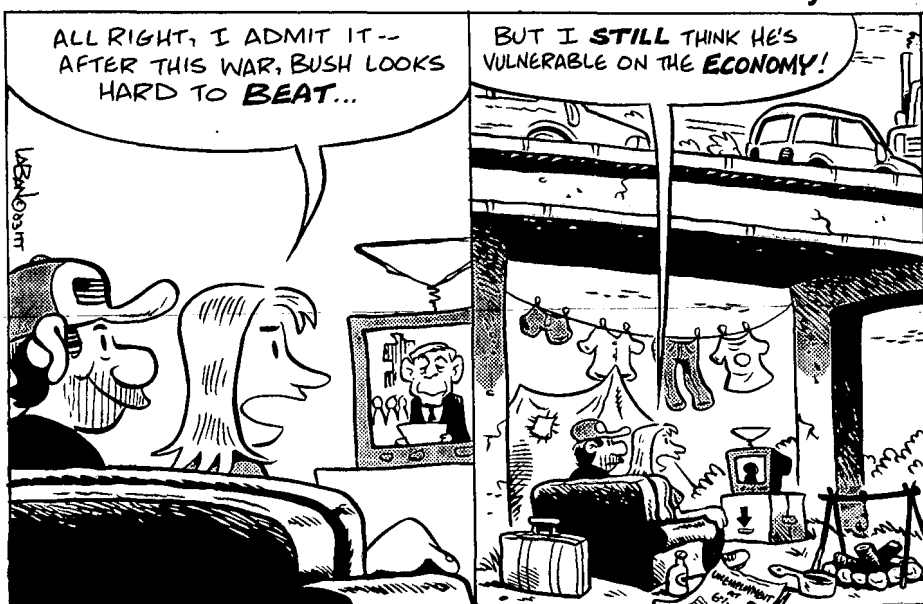
Those who believe in democracy, whatever our political party or economic ideas, need a unifying (and practical) idea. My sugges-

tion is this: a 28th Amendment to the Constitution. It would make it impossible for Congress to pass a Constitutional amendment. It would become the law of the land. Legislators can mess with it, and the courts can't overturn it—as they just overturned the congressional

"soft money" bills. This has happened many times. We need to establish a new Constitutional principle. To candidates, we say: Either you give a firm promise to enact this amendment or you're out—whatever you are, no matter your other policies.

—Mary Pjerrou

Terry LaBan



Food Fight

Europe and America gear up for a confrontation at the WTO

By Amanda Castleman

Europeans have never liked genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. The products—nicknamed “Frankenfoods”—have been banned in Europe for the past five years.

These days, Europeans fear long-term health consequences and environmental contamination. They want to track GMOs from the seed sack to the dinner table, so any trouble can be quickly pinpointed and controlled. And they demand labels on all modified products, giving each citizen the ability to choose whether to purchase them.

But the outright GMO ban ends this year, and the European Union is renegotiating its policy. Politicians have been slowly hammering out the details of the plan, amid fierce public protests. But many member states—including Italy, France, Greece, Austria and Denmark—remain dubious. Their demands for maximum protection have delayed action.

Now, America plans to administer a force-feeding. The United States—peevish by the loss of \$300 million in agricultural sales each year—is threatening to spark a trade war over GMOs.

In February, House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman and several other members of Congress urged the Bush administration to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization. U.S. Trade Rep. Robert Zoellick also advocates a WTO case, but prefers strength in numbers. In January, he called for an international coalition against “Luddite” Europe. Only Argentina, another GMO breadbasket, has expressed any interest in the crusade.

The bluster has not impressed politicians across the pond. E.U. Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy responded: “If there was to be litigation, of course we would fight it, and I believe we would win it.”

A WTO case is far more likely to alienate Europeans than persuade them, E.U. officials warn. They have asked the Bush administration to be patient and allow the political process to unfold. At a February press con-



European protesters tear up genetically modified plants at a farm in Warwickshire, England.

ference, Franz Fischler, the E.U. farm commissioner, explained: “We are in the final phases of passing our laws in Parliament, and we would strongly advise not to start an action that would disrupt that.”

Expecting a renewed push now that the war in Iraq is over, Europeans remain wary. The philosophical rift between Europe and the United States over GMOs is wider—and stormier—than the Atlantic. America unflinchingly added GMOs to the menu in 1996 (though a modified tomato had flopped two years before). Experts estimate that 70 percent of processed goods in U.S. supermarkets contain engineered ingredients.

Soybeans, corn and canola oil are the main genetically engineered crops in America. These staples appear in bread, cereal, crackers, flour, pasta, margarine, chocolate, candy and ice cream. Not even infant formula is *au naturel* any more—though manufacturers are not required to indicate that on the packaging.

So far, biotech companies have filed 19 applications to sell genetically modified products in Europe. Many Europeans see this as selling out to agribusiness and international pressure. American critics consider the E.U. application process a sham that would require U.S. growers to

completely transform their processes for growing and storing food.

Europeans might agree. Because of the way they’re grown, says Pete Riley from Friends of the Earth U.K., few American crops would pass muster. “The European market wants to track food from the field to the plate,” he says.

The intent is to be able to quickly preempt disasters like the outbreak of mad cow disease that struck Europe during the ’90s. “We see this as quite modern and 21st century,” Riley continues, “while the American system seems quite backward and 17th century.”

Yet trade officials are unlikely to respect Europe’s autonomy when agribusiness companies like Monsanto are faltering financially. A WTO case could last three years, sparking immense bitterness between the two blocs.

Improperly handled, modified genes could imbalance the ecosystem and agriculture—and mistakes have already been made. Critics accuse Monsanto and other big biotech companies of trying to contaminate the entire world’s seed stock, thereby rendering the debate over GMOs moot. With stakes so high, Winters says, “This case could undermine the entire legitimacy of the WTO.” ■

The "K" Word

U.S. turns its back on Kyoto and global warming

By Karen Charman

As evidence of global warming mounts, the Bush administration and right-wing, industry-funded "researchers" who have long denied the phenomenon are trying a new tactic: muzzle the science.

In February, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a pro-market think tank, asked the Bush administration to "cease dissemination" of a government report on grounds that it violates a new regulation, the Data Quality Act. The report, the *National Assessment of Climate Change*, modeled the likely impact of global warming on the United States. The unprecedented research effort took several years and involved government agencies, scientists and academics.

The Data Quality Act requires federal agencies to ensure the information they dis-

seminate is accurate, and to enable interested parties—that is, industry—to challenge the information if they disagree. According to one high-ranking government official, who requested anonymity, the law—which was slipped into a 2001 appropriations bill without hearings—"could be used to undermine any legitimate scientific effort" that threatens corporate interests.

Burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide, the main culprit in planetary warming, into the atmosphere. The journal *Science* reports that energy consumption over the last 100 years has increased 16-fold, bumping atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide to their highest level in 420,000 years.

Acknowledging the existence of global warming threatens the fossil fuel industry, because mitigating or reversing it means shunning fossil fuels like coal and oil. Rather than deal with the problem, the powerful and hugely profitable fossil fuel industry has engaged in an aggressive disinformation campaign to discredit the science and disrupt any effort to solve it.

As higher levels of greenhouse gases trap heat in the Earth's upper atmosphere, ris-

ing global temperatures are destabilizing climate patterns—thawing the permafrost in Alaska, melting glaciers, and causing enormous ice shelves to break apart in both the Arctic and Antarctica. The melting ice is expected to raise sea levels four to 40 inches by 2100, scientists say, submerging islands and coastal regions throughout the world. According to Robert Gagosian, director of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, the influx of fresh water into the northern Atlantic Ocean could disrupt global ocean currents and potentially lead to a "mini ice age" in the northeastern United States and Europe, even as the rest of the planet warms.

Escalating weather-related disasters, which confirm computer-modeled predictions, are further discrediting the naysayers. And even the Bush administration now reluctantly admits global climate change is occurring as a result of burning fossil fuels.

That doesn't mean they're doing much about it. President Bush's climate change plan, announced last year, has called for 10 more years of study and voluntary reductions of 18 percent in greenhouse gas intensity by 2012. The Kyoto Protocol, which Bush rejected, calls for 5 percent reductions from 1990 levels for industrialized nations by 2012. The United States, with 4 percent of the world's population, is the largest contributor to global warming, releasing about 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gases into the environment each year.

The environmental community dismisses the plan for voluntary reductions in greenhouse gas intensity as business as usual. Because the measures suggest decreases in the rate of growth of greenhouse gas emissions—rather than actual reductions—the policy on its own will actually increase greenhouse emissions 14 percent by 2012, says Dan Lashof, a climate scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Jerry Mahlman, a climate scientist with the National Center for Atmospheric Research, says scientists cannot predict exactly how much carbon in the atmosphere will tip off a catastrophic cascade of climate change, or what exactly the effects will be in any given region. But, he says, the future is here: Since carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for at least 100 years, past emissions have already committed the world to significant future climate change.

And censoring the science won't make it go away. ■

THIS MODERN WORLD

HEY, LIBERALS! DOES THE CURRENT REPUBLICAN STRANGLEHOLD ON ALL THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT FILL YOU WITH DESPAIR? WELL, CHEER UP! AT LEAST YOU CAN ALWAYS COUNT ON...

THE UNCOMPROMISING LIBERAL MEDIA

THEY'VE BEEN ON GEORGE BUSH'S CASE FROM DAY ONE! THANKS TO THEIR TIRELESS EFFORTS, THERE'S NOT A MAN, WOMAN OR CHILD IN THIS COUNTRY WHO REGARDS HIS PRESIDENCY AS LEGITIMATE!

EVERYONE KNOWS GORE WOULD HAVE WON AN HONEST RECOUNT! AND WHAT ABOUT ALL THOSE BLACK VOTERS WHO WERE "ACCIDENTALLY" DROPPED FROM THE ROLLS?



AND THEY'RE STILL AT IT! WHEN A WHITE HOUSE OFFICIAL OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE EVIDENCE FOR W.M.D.'S HAD BEEN OVERSTATED TO JUSTIFY WAR WITH IRAQ, THE MEDIA COULD HAVE BURIED THE STORY-- BUT OF COURSE THEY DIDN'T!

THE WHITE HOUSE TRIED TO MANIPULATE PUBLIC OPINION THROUGH BLATANT FEAR-MONGERING! DID THEY THINK THE UNCOMPROMISING LIBERAL MEDIA WOULD LET THEM GET AWAY WITH IT?



AND WHEN THE PRESIDENT FLEW OUT TO THAT AIRCRAFT CARRIER IN A JET, THE UNCOMPROMISING LIBERAL MEDIA MADE SURE WE KNEW HE COULD JUST HAVE EASILY GONE IN A HELICOPTER!

NOW THAT THE WHOLE TRIP HAS BEEN EXPOSED AS A TAXPAYER SUBSIDIZED PHOTO OP-- --I'M SURE WE'LL NEVER SEE THOSE PICTURES OF BUSH IN A FLIGHT SUIT AGAIN!



AND THE MEDIA CERTAINLY WEREN'T GOING TO LET THE PRESIDENT BASK IN THE GLOW OF THE MILITARY WITHOUT REMINDING US OF HIS OWN LESS-THAN-STARLING SERVICE RECORD!

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE VIETNAM WAR, HIS FAMILY PULLED STRINGS TO GET HIM INTO THE TEXAS AIR NATIONAL GUARD-- --AND EVEN THEN, HE WENT AWOL FOR A YEAR!



YES, THESE ARE HARD TIMES FOR LIBERALS--BUT REMEMBER, WITHOUT THE UNCOMPROMISING LIBERAL MEDIA, THINGS COULD BE A LOT WORSE!

WHERE WOULD WE BE WITHOUT THEIR TIRELESS EFFORTS TO EXPOSE BUSH'S CHICANERY AND DECEIT? I SHUDDER TO EVEN CONSIDER IT!



The Disappeared

In Juárez's *maquiladoras*, murders of women continue

By Kari Lydersen

CUIDAD JUÁREZ, MEXICO—On top of a hillside where a rutted dirt road curves beside a fence made of old mattress springs, the dusty brown and gray landscape is broken by a line of bright-pink wooden crosses adorned with plastic roses.

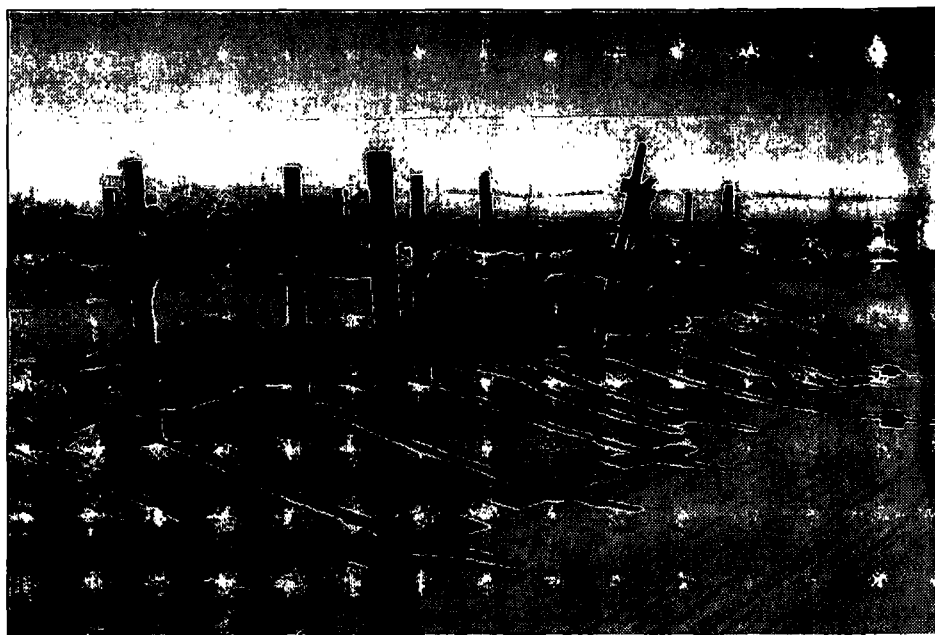
There is a saying in the area that, if you want to find Juárez, located just across the border from El Paso, Texas, just follow the crosses. And there are a lot of them.

More than 350 women have been murdered in Juárez since 1993, and hundreds more women have disappeared. Most of them fit a similar profile—young women who came from other parts of the country to work in the *maquiladoras*, the factories on the border that take advantage of Mexico's cheap labor to produce goods for U.S. and international companies. Many of the women disappeared on their way to or from work, perhaps while waiting for the buses that take them between the *maquiladoras* and the shantytowns on the outskirts of town in the late-night or predawn hours.

Government records list many of the women as victims of unknown assailants, and many of the victims themselves are unidentified. They list 93 as victims of a serial killer. A chilling number of the murders—178—are listed as incidents of domestic violence. The women were killed by jealous husbands or boyfriends.

For years, the mothers of these women felt like they were alone in the world. When they would report women as disappeared, the police would suggest the women were out with boyfriends—until they turned up in shallow graves, often raped and mutilated.

In the past two years, increasing international attention has been focused on the femicide occurring in Juárez. This spring, the FBI agreed to investigate the killings, and the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has a file open on the murders. On International Women's Day, March 8, 1,000 people marched in Juárez and El



Pink crosses remember the deaths of women in Juárez.

Paso protesting domestic violence and demanding an end to the killings. A documentary about the murders called *Señorita Extraviada* has been shown on PBS and in cities around the United States.

Yet it is not enough. The disappearances continue, with four more bodies found in February. As chronicled in *Señorita Extraviada*, many think the police themselves are to blame for some of the murders. "It's the police doing it; that's why they won't investigate," said a 25-year-old male cafeteria worker after a shift in early March. "That's what everyone thinks."

And the culture of sexism and misogyny in the *maquiladora* sector continues—a culture in which the women who make up over 60 percent of the *maquiladora* work force are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse on a daily basis. "All the corporations have the same code of conduct—sexual harassment, mandatory pregnancy tests, humiliation," says Veronica Leiba, a former *maquiladora* worker who now works for the labor union CETLAC.

Advocates for the *maquiladora* workers note wages are so low—not even enough to afford a basic basket of necessities for 45 hours of work per week—that some women are forced to turn to prostitution to survive, a lifestyle that makes them especially vulnerable to predators. Meanwhile, a story that has gone largely untold in recent coverage of the murders is that—alleged police

connections and serial killers aside—many women are being killed by their domestic partners, not by mysterious, unaccounted-for assailants.

In the most recent attempt to explain the rest of the deaths, the Mexican government announced in early May that it was investigating whether the women had been murdered by organ traffickers. At press time, federal and state authorities continued to fight over who had jurisdiction over the case.

Esther Chavez Cano, founder of Casa Amiga, Juárez's only domestic violence resource center, sees the murders as part of a larger picture of machismo and oppression of women in Juárez. Jobs are being lost at the *maquiladoras* as companies look for ever cheaper labor in Asia, she says. "So domestic violence increases, alcoholism increases. The men don't have work, and they feel like they are supposed to be the supporters of the family, so they are frustrated, and they abuse."

A number of U.S. and Mexican feminists and activists have remarked on the seeming absence of men from the frontlines of the fight to end the disappearances in Juárez, including the women's own fathers, boyfriends or other male family members. But it also underscores the fact that beyond the gruesome murders lies a border culture rife with the attitude that women are expendable—a culture that allows this femicide to keep happening. ■

Low Exposure, High Risk

E.U. study finds radiation riskier than previously thought

By Tony Wesolowsky

PRAGUE—Sixty-five million people will die from pollution caused by nuclear energy and weapons programs built before 1989, according to a report published earlier this year by a European scientific committee. The research, from the European Committee on Radiation Risk (ECRR), raises doubts about previous estimates of the risk posed to humans

from exposure to radiation from nuclear power and weapons.

The study by the ECRR, based on a risk-assessment model developed over the past five years, challenges previous assumptions about the safety of even minimum exposure to low-level radiation. With lower-threshold calculations for the risk of exposure to radiation than have been used in the past, the report found that radioactive releases up to 1989 have caused, or will eventually cause, the death of 65 million people worldwide.

For years, scientists have debated claims that radiation causes the higher incidence of cancer rates observed near nuclear power plants.

The ECRR is an international group of 30 independent scientists led by Chris Busby, a member of the British govern-

ment's radiation risk committee and adviser to the Ministry of Defense on the use of depleted uranium, and Professor Alexey Yablokov, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The study was commissioned by the European Union.

The report points to a rise in breast cancer rates among women who were adolescent between 1957 and 1963, during the height of atmospheric nuclear weapons testing worldwide.

The ECRR findings also challenge the International Commission on Radiological Protection, a group that for decades has been the main authority on radiation health risks. ECRR criticizes the group for underestimating the dangers associated with exposure to low-level radiation and maintaining chummy ties with the nuclear industry.

Keeping Tabs on Our Pals

When we last heard from the company ChoicePoint, it was explaining how its subsidiary, Database Technologies, arbitrarily disenfranchised thousands of disproportionately African-American Florida voters in the 2000 election. Now the Atlanta-based company is a little red-faced about another favor it's doing for the Bush administration. Mexican and Nicaraguan officials are investigating the company for collecting detailed information of citizens of those countries, according to the *Guardian*, as part of a \$67 million contract with the U.S. government. The contract went into effect in late September 2001, and a ChoicePoint executive claims the information is part of a government security operation and covers several countries in Central and South America. Latin Americans have been shocked to learn that American agents are compiling data that includes names and addresses, occupations, physical descriptions, and even tax records and blood groups.

BY DAVE MULCAHEY

Santorum Head

Sen. Rick Santorum, staunch foe of all things queer, has finally found a kind of diversity he can get behind—"ideological diversity." The Pennsylvania Republican reportedly plans to introduce legislation that would punish educational institutions that do not uphold such diversity. According to the Independent Media Center, Santorum wants to revise Title IX of the Higher Education Act to include ideological correctness along with gender parity as prerequisites for federal funding.

Observers believe the target of Santorum's bill would be campuses that permit professors and student groups to criticize Israel. According to the Independent Media Center, Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback has an alternate scheme in mind that would set a federal commission to investigate anti-Semitic speech and acts on U.S. campuses. Santorum, Brownback and a handful of conservative Christian senators met with representa-

tives of several Jewish organizations, including the Council on Christian Anti-Semitism, to discuss the bill. The bill was introduced in the House of Representatives on September 10, 2001. A full editorial later leaked Santorum's plan in the *New York Sun*.

Amazing Grace

The Grace News Network makes no secret of its dedication to "transmitting the evidence of God's presence in the world today." Indeed, while it reports "secular" news, it also likes to add in "proclamations that will 'change the news' to reflect the Kingdom of God and its purposes." What's the harm in that?

Problem is, Grace Digital Media, an outfit tied to the Grace News Network, is doing the production work for the Arabic-language satellite TV broadcasts for

Iraq launched recently by the U.S. government. According to a report published by Avenet.org, the broadcast is for the U.S. government, the federal agency that runs Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, contracted with Grace to provide equipment, studio space, and technical personnel. Agency officials maintain Grace will not be involved in editorial content.

Still, it may strike even reasonable folks as odd that the voice of their new liberator is delivered by a company that claims to be a "unique tool in the Lord's ministry plan for the world" and recently produced a documentary titled *Israel: Divine Destiny*.



A Green Party member of the European Parliament, Caroline Lucas, faulted current models of nuclear risk analysis for failing to account for high child leukemia rates in a statement supporting the ECRR. "These shocking new figures give the nuclear debate a renewed urgency," she said. "People are dying—and continue to die—in the millions."

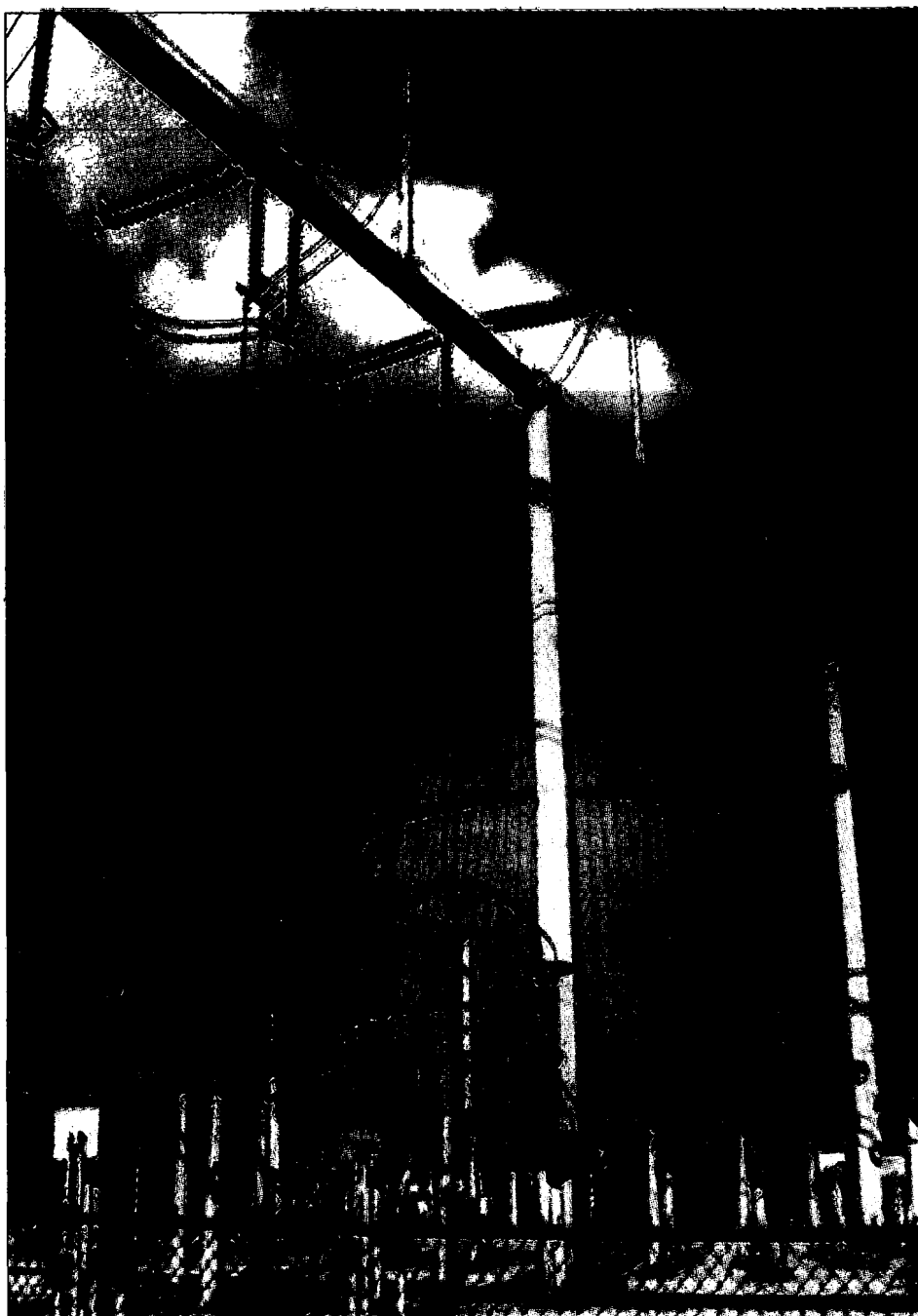
In an e-mail response to questions, Norman Gentner of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) called the ECRR findings "utter nonsense" based on "pseudo-scientific methodology."

But the ECRR says its calculations are in agreement with the observed incidence of cancer and ill health following disasters like Chernobyl.

The research comes amid fresh warnings over the cement sarcophagus entombing the damaged reactor at the decommissioned nuclear plant at Chernobyl, Ukraine, where the world's worst nuclear nightmare played out on April 26, 1986. In April, Russia's atomic energy minister, Alexander Rumyantsev, said the cement encasing is collapsing and urgently needs reinforcement.

The aftermath of Chernobyl is being felt 17 years later. The head of an Irish charity helping the victims of Chernobyl has warned of a spike in thyroid cancer among children in neighboring Belarus. "What we are witnessing in Belarus is the erosion of the nation's health," says Adi Roche, founder of the Chernobyl Children's Project. Roche, whose group recently brought \$3.2 million in aid to Belarus, speaks of "soaring" infertility rates, and warns genetic mutations are now being passed on to a new generation. "Many of those who were children at the time of the explosion are now beginning their own families, and we are seeing the effects of radiation being passed on to the next generation and into the gene pool. The rate of congenital birth deformities is frighteningly high," she told Agence France Presse.

The world's other known nuclear meltdown took place at Three Mile Island in central Pennsylvania in 1979. A frequently cited study conducted by Columbia University in 1990 concluded that the accident had caused no ill effects on the exposed population. Other scientists disagree. Steve Wing, an epidemiol-



MICHAEL WILLIAMS / GETTY

Nuclear radiation isn't safe at any level, says a controversial E.U. study.

ogist at the University of North Carolina School of Public Health, found in 1997 that people living closer to the path of the escaping radiation cloud developed all cancer types more frequently, especially lung cancer and leukemia.

Among the 20,000 people who lived near the plant and close to the plume's path, lung cancer and leukemia rates were two or more times higher than what they

were near the plant and upwind from the plume, according to Wing's study. Among those in the most direct path of the plumes, lung cancer incidence was elevated by 300 percent to 400 percent, and leukemia rates were up by 600 percent to 700 percent.

Those kind of percentages more than make clear that nuclear power carries heavy risks. If only the nuclear industry and its supporting cast would open their eyes. ■

A Green Peace Citigroup and Rainforest Action Network call a truce

By Ben Winters

Maybe it was his appearance at Cornell University on April 2 that pushed Sanford "Sandy" Weill over the edge. The Citigroup CEO and chairman, a Cornell alum and donor, struggled to stay on message while enduring a barrage of protests from members and allies of Rainforest

munity Relations, Pam Flaherty. The message was: Enough.

The result is what RAN calls a "cease-fire" and what Citigroup folks prefer to term a "new phase in an ongoing dialogue." Either way, it is unquestionably a turning point in RAN's 3-year-old Campaign for a Sane Economy, which has portrayed Citigroup as a sort of alpha polluter, providing funds to environmentally destructive logging and mining projects all over the globe.

But the environmentalists are calling off their activism, for now, to enter what RAN organizer Dan Firger characterizes as "an intensive period of negotiation." The goal

represents a good-faith effort to take into consideration [carbon dioxide] emissions."

In a letter to shareholders and RAN's membership, Citigroup stresses its recent leadership in drafting the "equator principles," a set of global environmental standards agreed to by four of the world's largest project finance banks: Citigroup, ABN AMRO, Barclays and WestLB. The corporation promised to do more "in the short term to reduce degradation or destruction of endangered ecosystems in the conduct of our business."

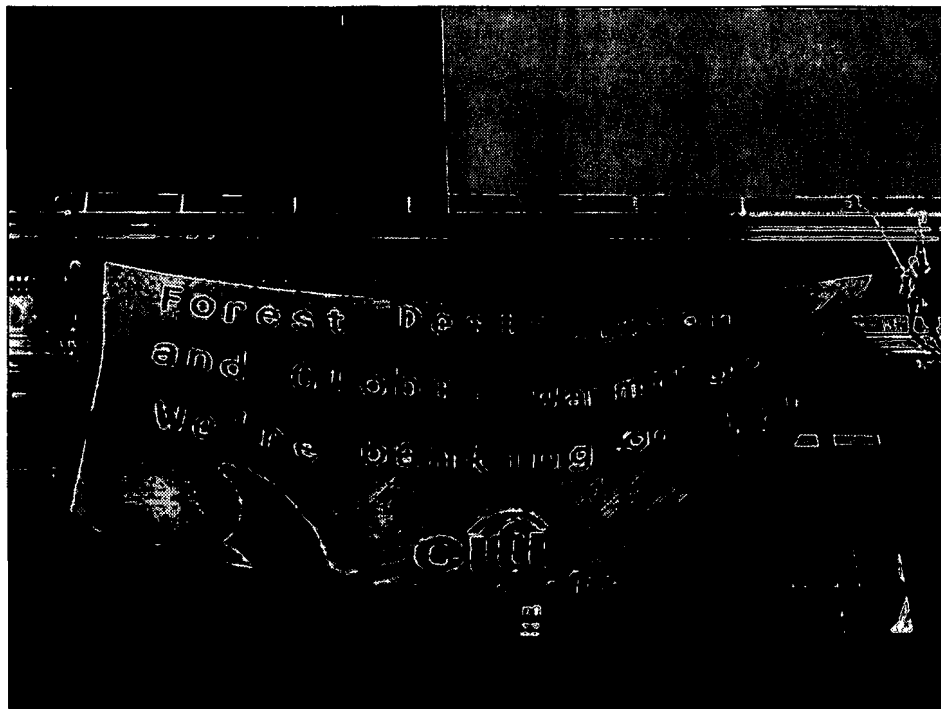
But RAN will be seeking more than that at the negotiating table, says Firger: "We're looking for really specific language and very specific commitments." RAN wants Citigroup to establish "no-go zones" that will be off-limits to the kind of massive, environmentally disruptive resource extractions often funded by project finance banks.

A Citigroup spokeswoman reports that the bank is "very happy to be in a positive dialogue with RAN." She adds, "We're a very large company, and we have a very complex set of issues to deal with, and you can't just do some things overnight. I think that is part of this whole conversation."

But Firger is optimistic, and says he feels there has been a "perception shift" in leadership at the corporation. The same could be said for RAN, which will suddenly be working alongside a bank it has spent the last three years condemning as one of the world's most destructive. (As if to underscore the dangers of sleeping with the enemy, a few weeks after the Citibank-RAN announcement, the *Washington Post* ran a damning story on a much larger green organization, the Nature Conservancy, that charged the group with maintaining chummy relationships with major polluters.)

Deciding when and to what degree to compromise with Citigroup is a "fine line to walk," says Firger.

"We want to win real concessions from corporations that are destroying the planet while at the same time not legitimizing the corporation, or giving them a 'green' stamp of approval. The thing we keep in mind is there are ecosystems all around the world—and indigenous people living on these sites where projects are being proposed—for whom these concessions are a matter of life and death. A victory, even partial, makes a difference in the lives of people." ■



A banner drops on a building in New York City. RAN's 3-year campaign finally wore Citibank down.

Action Network—including two students who unfurled a giant banner that read "Destroying old growth forests isn't cool" before being hustled out of the auditorium.

Or maybe it was RAN's television ad campaign, launched in the New York area a week before the Citigroup April 15 shareholder meeting, in which various celebrities castigated the financial behemoth for its environmental record.

Whatever the cause, on April 11 RAN's leadership got a message from Citigroup's Vice President for Global Com-

munity Relations, Pam Flaherty. The message was: Enough. The result is what RAN calls a "cease-fire" and what Citigroup folks prefer to term a "new phase in an ongoing dialogue." Either way, it is unquestionably a turning point in RAN's 3-year-old Campaign for a Sane Economy, which has portrayed Citigroup as a sort of alpha polluter, providing funds to environmentally destructive logging and mining projects all over the globe.

But the environmentalists are calling off their activism, for now, to enter what RAN organizer Dan Firger characterizes as "an intensive period of negotiation." The goal is simple: a set of commitments to environmental citizenship that RAN hopes will "set a bar" for the entire financial industry. He cites RAN's 1999 victory in pressuring Home Depot to stop selling old-growth wood, which led other, smaller home-goods retailers to do likewise.

When the Rainbow Isn't Enough

"Everything we've done has been absolutely radical," says Chris Smith, co-founder and current board president of Chicago's Affinity Community Services. How radical?

Radical enough to establish an out and proud group for black lesbian and bisexual women on Chicago's South Side. "We decided to plant roots and be decidedly visible," Smith says.

Affinity sits several miles south of, and a world away from, the city's officially designated gay neighborhood, Lakeview (or "Boystown"). Despite the Art Deco rainbow pylons and rows of pride flags, Lakeview has not historically been a welcoming place for all gay people, particularly women and people of color.

It was with that in mind that Affinity was founded nearly seven years ago by black gay and lesbian activists who saw a need for services and support on the predominantly African-American South Side.

From meetings that began in board members' living rooms, Affinity has grown into a nonprofit that serves about 1,000 women each year from a large garden space rented from the First Unitarian Church of Chicago in Hyde Park. Last year the volunteer-driven group hired its first full-time employee, an office administrator.

Women come to meetings and events from across the city. Among them is Gaylon Roberson, the group's vice-president, who made the hike from Lincoln Park, on the North Side, to attend her first meeting.

Roberson discovered Affinity in 1997 while she was in the process of leaving an abusive marriage to a man and acknowledging her growing attraction to a female co-worker. She called every group she could find in a local black, gay newspaper, and Affinity was the only one to call her back. When she went to her first meeting and discovered a group of women sitting in a circle with candles and incense, "I just felt really comfortable," she says.

"They really feel like my sisters," she says of her fellow board members. "I'm not saying we always get along," she adds, laughing, "but it feels like my family."

Affinity's events and programs are aimed at serving nearly every member of that family, from teens to seniors, from those newly

out to veterans of the lesbian community, and from those looking for a social outlet to those looking for something overtly political. "When one of our constituents says, 'My life is so changed because of this,' it feels so good," says Roberson, who just finished a three-year stint as volunteer coordinator. "The stories are wonderful."

While Affinity has attained a level of success and visibility in the gay and lesbian community—including induction into Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame—things haven't always been easy. "People don't take black women seriously," Smith, the board president, says. "We've been called everything, [including] low-class dykes in the basement." This is despite the fact that several board members hold Ph.D.s and other advanced degrees.

At one off-site fundraiser several years ago, the staff helping the group set up kept asking where the men were, who was paying, and who was in charge if there weren't going to be any men.

After that rocky start, however, the staff at the annual event has come to value Affinity's business, Smith says.

And as others become more comfortable with the women served by Affinity, Smith says those women are becoming more comfortable with themselves and their surroundings.

She said a custodian at their building noted that when Affinity first moved into its current home in 1998, the women had one of two demeanors: They were visibly frightened or had their dukes up to fight. After a year, women were leaving the space loudly

laughing and talking, no longer afraid of drawing attention to themselves.

Affinity has always had to overcome the misconception that it isn't safe to be out on Chicago's South Side. Attendance at its events and programs has grown steadily since the move to its current location, both because of growing awareness and because the new space sits squarely in the progressive Hyde Park neighborhood, home of the University of Chicago.



Affinity Board President Chris Smith and supporter Jackie Anderson at an Affinity fundraiser.

Smith says that while Affinity's women refuse to be cowed into hiding, safety is an overriding concern as they consider their next move. And a move is likely imminent as Affinity continues to grow.

Roberson said one of the most empowering things about being involved with Affinity is that everyone has the potential to effect change. "You can realistically have an impact," she says. "You can change the face of history and make change for all of us."

"Black women should be in control of our sexuality, of our lives," Roberson continues. "It's really about us living our lives like we want to live them." ■

The Progressive War

By Salim Muwakkil

Among the many effects of the terrorism attacks of September 11, 2001, was the ideological shift they provoked among those on the left. Many left-leaning commentators were so disconcerted by some of their fellow travelers' responses to the attacks, they jumped straight into bed with the neocon war party.

Journalists like Christopher Hitchens, Paul Berman, Ron Rosenbaum, Greil Marcus and Dan Savage are four of the most prominent of these prowar progressives. But several others, including comedian/commentator Dennis Miller, said they too were shocked rightward by the left's reflexive, "blame-America" reaction to 9/11.

The U.S. response to terrorism pushed me in a different direction. Sure, I was surprised, terrified and angered by the cold savagery of the hijackers and the intensity of their grievances. But I also was dumbfounded by our nation's refusal to acknowledge its role in nurturing those grievances. The United States has thwarted democracy, inserted puppet dictators, smothered human rights, and stifled freedom in many countries in the Middle East. Did we think that our long history of ignoble intervention in the region would leave no angry aftermath?

This tendency to deny responsibility for the consequences of dubious deeds is a hallowed American tradition that is familiar to me as an African-American and a descendant of enslaved Africans. Denial doesn't expunge the errors of history; it compounds them. Victims of those errors don't disappear, and their quest for justice doesn't dissipate.

When history's victims inevitably lash out, their grievances are downplayed and they become targets of revenge rather than mediation—perpetuating the cycle. One of the roles of progressives is to connect the dots linking present disorders to past injustices. But fear of future terrorist attacks has convinced pro-war progressives to abandon that role and push for a muscular response to the present danger. But instead of discouraging potential terrorists, our mili-

tary aggression likely is seeding vast fields of future antagonists, and nothing we have in our high-tech arsenal will be able to stem that hostile tide.

If we deny the historical context that connects the "asymmetrical warfare" that we call terrorism to the past, we are only postponing a necessary reckoning. The pro-war progressives know this, but they are fearful, and fear is the right's best



recruiter. The defection of Hitchens, a British expatriate and ex-Trotskyite, is perhaps the most significant of the bunch. Until recently, he was a regular *Nation* columnist and one of the left's most gifted polemicists. Hitchens' pro-war argument is fueled by a powerful strain of anti-clericalism. He frames the ongoing war on terrorism (he included the Iraq invasion under this rubric) as a seminal struggle between totalitarian theocrats (or "Islamofascists") and the protectors of civil society.

"The theocratic and absolutist side in this war hopes to win it by exporting it here, which in turn means that we have no expectation of staying out of the war, and no right to be neutral in it," he wrote in his last column for *The Nation*. He resigned as a columnist because he said the publication was "becoming the voice and the echo chamber of those who truly believe that John Ashcroft is a greater menace than Osama bin Laden."

Hitchens' view is similar to that of Paul Berman, whose recent book *Terror and Liberalism* also urges a strenuous battle against Islamist totalitarians. By portraying the war on terrorism as a battle of lib-

eralism vs. fascism, the pro-war progressives seek to claim the tradition of the anti-Stalinist left of Cold War lore. But that analogy is faulty.

The Arab world has legitimate grievances, and by ignoring them we are feeding the totalitarian impulse driving the Islamist cults. Were the administration more skilled in diplomacy and not dominated by the bellicose neocons that have hijacked U.S. foreign policy, it might have used the world's sympathy following 9/11 to organize a more efficient global fight against terrorism. After all, diplomatic pressure from Libya and Egypt is what forced Sudan to eject Osama bin Laden in the '90s. Such an approach would have put the pressure on Muslim groups to speak out more vigorously against terrorism as an affront to Islam.

What's more, the United States could easily have helped to dry up grassroots support for Islamist cults with a tangible expression of assurance that it seeks to assist rather than destroy the Muslim world. Political gestures could have been modeled on the European Union's efforts at the 2001 U.N. conference on racism, when it vowed to forge new relationships between the colonized and the colonizers of history.

Instead, the Bush administration launched an illegal military invasion of

The pro-war progressives want to claim the tradition of the anti-Stalinist left of Cold War lore, but that analogy is faulty.

Iraq for what now appears to have been a fraudulent pretext; appointed Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, an open admirer of Israel; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, to head up Iraq's reconstruction effort; nominated the well-known Islamophobe Daniel Pipes to the U.S. Institute of Peace; and continues to act in a way that seems designed to produce exactly the hatred of the United States that the radical Islamists want to provoke.

If pro-war progressives truly seek to limit the allure of Islamofascism, they've chosen the wrong bedfellows. ■

The Court Takes on Gay Rights

By Vincent J. Samar

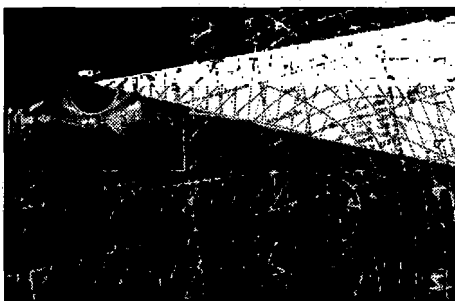
Expectations are running high in the gay community as the United States Supreme Court will shortly hand down a decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, a case that has the potential of reversing the infamous *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision from 1986. That case, which upheld as constitutional a Georgia statute that made same-sex "sodomy" a crime, has been used over and over to justify discrimination. Since certain conduct engaged in by sexually active gays and lesbians can be criminalized, states and the federal government have at different times claimed a right to deny the benefits of public employment (both military and non-military) and recognition of relationships (like adoption and marriage) to persons with a same-sex orientation.

In *Lawrence*, we have an almost analogous fact pattern to the *Bowers* case. This time it was Harris County, Texas, sheriff's officers who entered the home of John Lawrence on the evening of September 17, 1998, and found Lawrence and Tyron Garner having anal sex; in *Bowers*, it was oral sex. The officers were responding to a false report of a "weapons disturbance." Nevertheless, because of what the officers witnessed, they arrested the men, jailed them overnight and charged each with violating the Texas "Homosexual Conduct Law." That statute makes it a crime to have "deviate sexual intercourse," namely, anal and oral sex with a member of the same sex. (Interestingly, it does not criminalize the same behavior if performed by an opposite sex couple.)

Three questions are at stake in the Supreme Court's agreement to review the decision of the Texas Court of Appeals, which had affirmed the lower court's conviction of the two men. First, did the criminal convictions under the Texas statute violate the 14th Amendment right to equal protection of the law? Second, did the convictions for adult consensual intimacy in the home violate vital interests of liberty and privacy under the 14th Amendment due process clause? Finally, should *Bowers v. Hardwick* be overruled? These issues are important not only because they provide two avenues of

approach to the same basic problem—the constitutional right of adults to have consensual sex with someone of the same sex—but also because they have the potential to open doors in areas of employment, parenting and marriage law.

With regard to the first point, if the court finds the Texas statute violates a fundamental right to privacy, then it will have a basis, on that alone, to say that there has



also been an equal-protection violation. This is because one of the formulae for defining an equal-protection violation is that a fundamental right has been denied to some citizens without the state showing a compelling reason for that distinction.

Alternatively, or in conjunction with finding a due-process violation, the court can apply any of three standards to prevent discrimination. It could find that same-sex couples as a group constitute a suspect class that requires laws operating against them to be strictly construed. More likely, the court could find that gays and lesbians warrant an intermediate level of protection, on the grounds that much of the discrimination directed against them is founded on gender. Least likely, but not impossible, the justices could say that so long as the discriminatory effect has a rational basis tied to a legitimate governmental concern—like the protection of public mores—the discrimination is O.K. This is less likely because if the Supreme Court were going to take that route, given its prior decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, it need not have agreed to hear the case. This raises two questions: What impact will these different scenarios have on future cases, and how probable is each of them?

A probable lineup of how the justices will vote is that Stevens, Ginsburg, Souter and Breyer will be on the side of John Lawrence, while Rehnquist, Thomas and Scalia will be on the side of Texas. This will leave Kennedy and O'Connor as the swing votes. Kennedy, however, wrote the majority opinion in *Romer v. Evans*, which held unconstitutional, under the federal 14th Amendment equal protection clause, Amendment 2 to the Colorado state constitution, which prohibited the state legislature or any municipality from recognizing protected status for gays, lesbians or bisexual persons. So, he likely will be a favorable vote in this case. O'Connor's vote is less clear, because at the oral argument she questioned whether a finding for Lawrence would necessarily impact other areas of the law.

What impact these different scenarios may have on future non-sodomy cases will all depend on how broadly the justices articulate the right involved. If they limit the right to criminal sodomy statutes, then, while the result will be friendly, it will be less an indicator of future decisions. Alternatively, if the right is more broadly described, the impact on other areas of the law could be substantial. If these assumptions on the vote are correct, then the benefit of a narrower result is

A Texas law makes it a crime for people to have "deviate sexual intercourse."

that it will carry a 6-3 majority. On the other hand, if a broader opinion is written, then (assuming O'Connor joins in the decision with a narrowly tailored concurring opinion) that decision will be strong but the reasoning weak. That suggests the need for cautious optimism, as President Bush may soon have the opportunity to change the makeup of the court with new appointments. ■

Vincent J. Samar, a Chicago-area adjunct professor of law and philosophy, is the author of *The Right to Privacy: Gays, Lesbians and the Constitution*.

THE FIRST TON

GETTY IMAGES

By Joel Bleifuss

World War IV

We are in it, according to former CIA Director James Woolsey. "This fourth world war, I think, will last considerably longer than either World Wars I or II did for us," says Woolsey. "Hopefully not the full four-plus decades of the Cold War." (That was World War III, for those of you who missed it.) Woolsey, a member of the administration's neocon boys club, explains that World War IV is being waged against three enemies: the ayatollahs of Iran, the "Fascists" in countries like Syria, and Islamic extremists like al-Qaeda. Speaking to a teach-in at UCLA sponsored by the group Americans for Victory Over Terrorism, Woolsey went on to say:

As we move toward a new Middle East over the years and, I think, over the decades to come ... we will make a lot of people very nervous. Our response should be, "Good!" We want you nervous. We want you to realize now, for the fourth time in a hundred years, this country and its allies are on the march and that we are on the side of those whom you—the [Hosni] Mubarak[s] [of Egypt], the Saudi Royal family—most fear: We're on the side of your own people.

Whose Side Are We On?

But add a measure of historical perspective and conceits like Woolsey's are exposed for the crock they are. The Shah, Augusto Pinochet, Jonas Savimbi and Osama bin Laden are among the men who got a career in tyranny thanks to the CIA. To that list one can add Saddam Hussein. Richard Sale, United Press International's intelligence correspondent, reports that the CIA put Saddam Hussein

At a 1983 meeting in Baghdad, Donald Rumsfeld, then Ronald Reagan's envoy, greets Saddam Hussein. At the time, the CIA was supplying satellite intelligence to both Iran and Iraq in order to produce a stalemate in the Iran-Iraq War. After Rumsfeld's visit, relations between the Reagan and Saddam administrations dramatically improved, despite the fact that Washington knew Iraq was gassing Iranian soldiers and Iraqi civilians.

on its covert operations payroll in 1959. Citing information provided by current and former U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers, Sale reports that the CIA decided to kill then Iraqi Prime Minister Gen. Abd al-Karim Qasim, who had overthrown the Iraqi monarchy the year before in a bloody revolt. The United States wanted Qasim dead because he had begun to buy weapons from the Soviet Union and put Iraqi communists in positions of power. CIA Director Alan Dulles declared at the time that Iraq was "the most dangerous spot in the world."

So the CIA hired Saddam, then 22, and five other men to assassinate the Iraqi leader. However, according to a former CIA official, the assassination attempt, scheduled for October 7, 1959, failed when Saddam lost his nerve and began firing too soon, wounding Qasim and killing his driver. The CIA got Saddam out of town and eventually to Beirut, where it provided Saddam with an apartment and put him through a brief training course.

In 1963, Qasim was finally killed in a Baath Party coup. Former intelligence officials told Sale that after the coup, the CIA provided the anti-communist Baathists with a list of suspected commu-

nists, who were rounded up and executed en masse. A former CIA official said, "It was a bit like the mysterious killing of Iran's communists just after Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in 1979. All 4,000 of his communists suddenly got killed." (Guess where Khomeini got his list.)

Please, We're British

Parliament is currently considering a law that will permit U.S. media conglomerates to buy U.K. television and radio stations, and thoughtful people in Britain are skeptical. "In the area of impartiality, as in many other areas, we must ensure that we don't become Americanized," Greg Dyke, the BBC's director general told the *Financial Times*. Dyke is worried, having just witnessed American networks covering the war and "swapping impartiality for patriotism." Allowing America's corporate news networks onto the British Isles will, he says, make "the White House and the Pentagon all-powerful, with no news operation strong enough or brave enough to stand up against it. This is particularly so since September 11, when many U.S. networks wrapped themselves in the American flag."

Conflicts of Interest in Action

CNN was taking orders from the Pentagon during the war in Iraq. That is the gist of what the head of CNN news operations, Eason Jordan, revealed in an interview on the CNN program *Reliable Sources*, hosted by Howard Kurtz. During the interview, Kurtz asked Jordan about Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's public chastising of retired military officers for giving TV audiences their own interpretations of the war. So Jordan explained CNN policy:

Jordan: I went to the Pentagon myself several times before the war started and met with important people there and said, for instance, at CNN, "Here are the generals we're thinking of retaining to advise us on the air and off about the war." And we got a big thumbs-up on all of them. That was important.

Kurtz: Okay, we've got to leave it there.

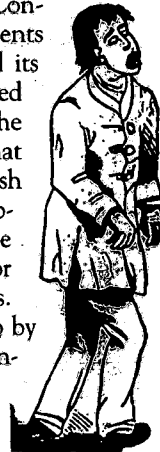
Huh? Kurtz apparently forgot that when not hosting *Reliable Sources*, he is employed as a media critic by the *Washington Post*.

Needed Jewish Voices

In April, 14 major Jewish philanthropists wrote a letter to congressional leaders expressing their strong support for Bush's "road map to peace," which, they write, "provides Israel with a distinct opportunity to escape the bloody status quo." By going public with their support, the letter's signers (among whom are Edgar Bronfman,

president of the World Jewish Congress, and current and past presidents of the United Jewish appeal and its successor organization, the United Jewish Communities) have for the first time given public notice that they do not support the hawkish stands of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Without mentioning either group by name, the writers "express our concern over recent efforts to sidetrack implementation of the 'road map.'... As passionate supporters of Israel, we also know that the Jewish state needs this kind of energetic American diplomacy."

Letter signer Alan Solomont told the *Washington Post*, "Over the last two and a half years, there's been just one organized voice that's been heard from our community, and given the importance of trying to change the dynamic here, I'm pleased to hear another voice emerging."



At 16.

Hands Off!

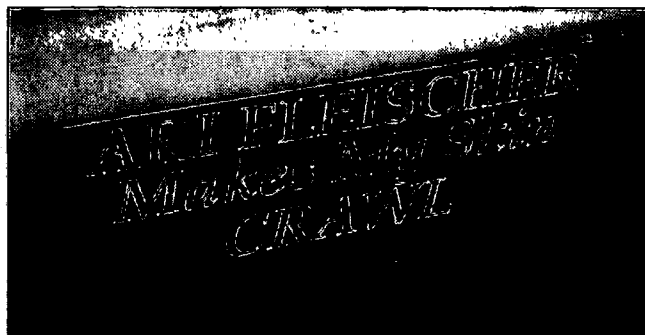
On the left, a 16-year-old masturbator; on the right, a 21-year-old abstainer, as originally depicted in Emery C. Abbey's *The Sexual System and Its Derangements* (1875), one of the illustrations featured in *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (2003, Zone Books) by Thomas W. Laqueur.



At 21.

Bumper Sticker Therapy

Chicago photographer Erich Schrempf couldn't find bumper stickers that expressed his true feelings, so he decided to make his own. Currently his car sports the one shown below. Others in the series have included "Honk If You Can't Stand Ashcroft," "Bush/Enron—the Best Government Money Can Buy," and, for Christmas, "Peace on Earth—This Means You George."



"I print these up when my blood begins to boil," says Schrempf. "It is very therapeutic."

He buys bumper sticker stock at Home Depot, prints them out on his ink-jet printer, and then sprays them with a fixative to keep the rain from dissolving the ink. ■

In These Times' New Publisher

With this issue, *In These Times* welcomes Jeff Epton as publisher. The name Epton first appeared in these pages in 1983. At that time, progressives in Chicago had joined in a citywide movement to elect Harold Washington as mayor. Washington made it through the primaries and went on to face Republican Bernie Epton. Jeff's father. As Bernie campaigned against Washington in Chicago, Jeff ran for a seat on the Ann Arbor city council as a member of the Democratic Socialists of America. Bernie lost, but Jeff won. He went on to serve three terms on the council, ending when time he worked as the Michigan Area Coordinator of the American Friends Service Committee. In 1983 he co-founded the

Dayton Voice, an independent weekly in Dayton, Ohio. In 2000, Jeff moved back to Chicago, where he helped establish the Illinois Death Penalty Moratorium Project and worked as a consultant in program development and strategic planning for nonprofit organizations.

"I feel like I have come home to *In These Times*," says Epton. "It has made a wonderful contribution to progressive politics these last 27 years. As I see it, my work will be to help the magazine make even larger contributions in the future."

And as we welcome Jeff, we bid farewell to managing editor Craig Aaron, who has been here for seven years. Aaron is moving to Washington to work for Public Citizen. However, he will remain on the masthead as a senior editor, and will be regularly sending reports from our nation's capital.

Finally, we draw your attention to a long, slightly condescending profile by Rebecca Mead in the May 3 New Yorker of *In These Times* contributing editor Steve Zuck. "The Marx Brothers Have a Sister" from Steven Leacock is an interesting story.



Bursting Bubbles

By Dean Baker

Where is the best place to go for good advice about the stock market and the economy? *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *Fortune*? If it's late 1999 and the stock market is soaring to record highs, the correct answer is *In These Times*. In December 1999, when the economic and political establishment was singing the praises of the "new economy" and promising an era of unparalleled prosperity, *In These Times* ran "After the Fall," a cover story by Dean Baker, which explained that a stock market crash was inevitable. Baker also warned of some of the consequences of the crash—downsized 401(k) retirement plans, a funding crisis for defined benefit pension plans, shrunken endowments for universities and foundations, and a recession pushing the unemployment rate up past 6 percent.

During the '90s boom, Baker was one of the few economists who clearly identified the stock market bubble. But no one in a position of power was willing to listen, even though the main thrust of the argument rested on basic arithmetic. Remarkably, the same "experts" who led the nation into the bubble are still dominating public debate on the economy.

So *In These Times* is willing to break with the conventional wisdom again. In the first of a special two-part series on the economy, Baker explains how related bubbles in the property and currency markets have yet to burst, and how that prospect could severely hamper our quality of life for years to come.

In 2000, President Clinton could legitimately boast of the "best economy in 30 years." Unemployment was low, wages were rising at all income levels, and the poverty rate was headed downward at a rapid pace. But after President Bush took office in 2001, the economy fell into recession, shedding jobs and causing real wage growth to slow and eventually stop altogether.

A convenient story explains this sharp economic reversal. According to the script, Clinton eliminated the deficit through progressive tax increases and spending restraint. This deficit reduction lowered interest rates and spurred an investment boom, which was the basis for the extraordinary growth of the late '90s. Then Bush came into office and quickly squandered the surplus with his tax cuts to the rich and military build-up. As a result, the deficit skyrocketed and the economy tanked.

It's a good story, but the reality is quite different. The Clinton boom was built on three unsustainable bubbles. One of them, the stock bubble, has already burst. The other two bubbles—the dollar bubble and the housing bubble—are still with us. The dollar bubble is starting to deflate, and the housing bubble is perhaps just now reaching its peak. These bubbles created the basis for the 2001 recession and the economy's continuing period of stagnation.

The basic facts of the economy's rapid deterioration over the last two years are widely known. After creating an average of more than 3 million jobs a year from 1996 to 2000, the economy has lost more than 2 million jobs since March 2001. This reversal has been associated with a rise in the unemployment rate from an average of 4 percent in 2000 to 6 percent today. The increase among African-Americans has been even larger, rising from 7.6 percent in 2000 to 10.9 percent in April, and larger yet for African-American teens, with the unemployment rate rising from just over 24 percent in 2000 to peaks as high as 35 percent in March. While real wages were growing at close to a 2 percent annual pace in 2000, wage growth has recently fallen to zero for most workers.

The economy's reversal was associated with a plunge in the stock market. The S&P 500 fell from a peak of more than 1,500 in March 2000, to lows of less than 800 in the past year. The tech-heavy Nasdaq took an even sharper plunge, falling from a peak of more than 5,000 in March 2000 to under 1,200 last summer. Adding to this picture is the reversal in the budget situation. The surplus of \$236 billion in 2000 has given way to a deficit that may reach \$500 billion in 2003.

Of course, the stock market downturn should not be included among the economic failings of the last two and a half years. That downturn really was just a healthy return to reality. The long stretch of new peaks that the market hit in the '90s should have been a warning of bad times ahead to anyone paying attention. Instead the boom was widely celebrated as evidence of a new era of unbounded prosperity. The failure by the Federal Reserve Board or the Clinton administration to take actions to stem the growth of the stock bubble laid the grounds for a train wreck; the only question up in the air was when it would hit.

While the day-to-day, or even month-to-month, movements of the market are erratic and unpredictable, there is an underly-

ing relationship between the stock market and the economy. In principle, the stock market is putting a price on the future profits of corporate America.

While no one can know the future with certainty, economists can plausibly forecast how high profits can go over a long horizon—say 10 to 15 years.

When the market was hitting its peaks in 2000, the ratio of stock prices to corporate earnings exceeded 30-to-1, more than twice its historic average. No plausible explanation could ever have justified this sort of valuation. In order for the stock

market peaks of 2000 to have made sense, it would have been necessary for profits to grow at close to twice their historic pace.

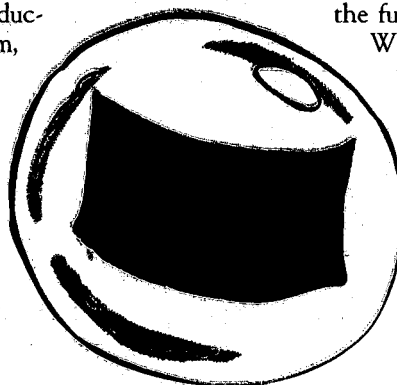
In short, any serious economic analyst should have been able to recognize the stock bubble of the late '90s. The fact that those in positions of responsibility either failed to recognize the bubble or chose to ignore it was a mistake with enormous consequences.

The stock market bubble added more than \$8 trillion of paper wealth to the economy. This stimulated the economy in two ways. First, when families see the value of their stock portfolios rise, they spend more, since they feel less need to put money aside for retirement or their kids' education. Just as the textbooks would predict, consumption boomed and savings fell through the floor in the late '90s and 2000.

The stock bubble also stimulated the economy through its effect on investment. Contrary to myth, firms rarely finance new investment by issuing shares of stock. However, the '90s boom was an exception to this rule. With Internet start-ups able to raise billions of dollars by selling shares on the Nasdaq, companies were using stock to finance new investment in a big way. Soaring stock prices fed directly into an investment boom concentrated in telecommunications and other high-tech sectors. Investment in equipment and software rose by more than \$300 billion between 1996 and 2000, an increase of more than 45 percent.

The bursting of the bubble threw this process into reverse. This was seen most clearly with investment, which in both 2001 and 2002 was down by more than \$140 billion from its peak in 2000. As we now know, much of the tech investment of the boom years was wasted on wild schemes that will never prove profitable. The tech sectors continue to have vast amounts of overcapacity, which will depress investment in semiconductors, telecommunications, and related sectors for years to come.

Consumption has fallen back somewhat, but not as much as might have been expected, given the loss of more than \$8 trillion in paper wealth in the stock market. Consumption has stayed strong in the post-crash world because of a second asset bubble. As was the case in Japan in the '80s, the stock market bubble of the late '90s was accompanied by a



housing bubble. The rise in home prices since 1995 has outpaced the overall rate of inflation by more than 30 percentage points. This sort of run-up in home prices has no precedent in the post-war era. The surge in home prices has created more than \$3 trillion in new housing wealth, as compared to a situation in which home prices had just kept pace with inflation.

Like stock wealth, housing wealth also spurs consumption. Families see the rising value of their homes as a source of wealth that they can draw upon to meet their needs. They have been drawing on this wealth with a vengeance in the past two years, as plunging interest rates have led to an unprecedented surge in mortgage borrowing. As a result, the ratio of mortgage debt to home equity is at near-record highs.

This situation is frightening for two reasons. First, as a short-run matter, if housing prices fall sharply in some of the areas where the effects of the bubble are largest (for example the Boston, New York, Washington, and San Francisco areas), new home buyers (and those who recently refinanced their mortgages and took money out) could find they have negative equity in their homes. If someone borrows \$270,000 to buy a \$300,000 home, and the price falls by one-third, this leaves them owing \$70,000 more than the home is worth. When this happens, there is a huge incentive to just let the mortgage holder foreclose on the home. If this were to happen on a large scale, the survival of many banks and financial institutions would be at risk.

The current high levels of mortgage debt are a problem for another reason. The population is aging, and many families are getting near retirement. With the front end of the baby boomers approaching 60, many homeowners should be near to paying off their mortgage. The demographics indicate that mortgage debt should be lower than it has been in prior decades. But on the contrary, many baby boomers are likely to hit retirement—after having just lost much of the wealth in their 401(k)s due to the stock market crash—and discover that their homes are worth much less than they had expected. These older baby boomers really need to be saving to ensure themselves a sufficient income in retirement, but the illusory wealth created by the housing bubble is preventing them from recognizing this fact.

While the housing bubble has its own logic, it is an outgrowth of the stock bubble. It began as a result of people using their newly created stock wealth to purchase better homes. This started home prices on an upward path, leading people to buy homes in anticipation of continually rising prices. The bubble will persist as long as people expect home prices to rise. When they lose this expectation, housing prices will fall back to more normal levels.

The '90s stock bubble is also partially responsible for other recent problems. One is the switch from surpluses to deficits at both the federal and state levels. The federal government col-

lected almost \$120 billion in capital gains tax revenue at the peak of the stock bubble in 2000, most of which came from gains on stock sales. When stock prices plunged, capital gains revenue did also. It is now projected at \$51 billion in 2003. Many states, especially California, were similarly affected by the stock crash.

The wave of corporate accounting scandals was also an outgrowth of the bubble. In an era in which corporations were routinely putting out profit projections that defied common sense, it was virtually inevitable that some executives would take the additional step to outright fraud. This was entirely predictable, since every prior speculative bubble has also been accompanied by large-scale financial fraud.

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To make matters worse, a third bubble from the '90s is also still with us—the dollar bubble. The Clinton administration deliberately pursued a "strong dollar" policy. This had the desirable short-term effect of restraining inflation and raising domestic living standards by making imports cheaper for people in the United States. (An undesirable short-term effect was the devastation of U.S. manufacturing.) However, in the long-term, the strong dollar policy is unsustainable. As a result of its massive bill for imports, the United States is currently borrowing more than \$550 billion a year from abroad (approximately 5.3 percent of GDP), since it is buying much more from abroad than it is selling. This borrowing is paid for by selling off U.S. assets. If the trade deficit remains at its current level, within a decade foreigners will own the entire stock market, much of the government debt and many of our homes.

At some point, the dollar will have to fall significantly to bring the deficit down to a sustainable level. When this happens, the resulting rise in import prices will contribute

to a rise in the inflation rate and a deterioration in domestic living standards. If the Federal Reserve Board raises interest rates to prevent an increase in the inflation rate, then the impact of the falling dollar will be especially painful, as higher unemployment, which accompanies higher interest rates, will be an inevitable result.

The triple bubble economy of the late '90s presents the most difficult set of economic problems since the Great Depression. The solutions are neither simple nor painless, but—just as was the case with the New Deal—big problems can open the door to big solutions. ■

Dean Baker is the co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. He also is the author of the Economic Reporting Review, a weekly online commentary on the economic reporting in the New York Times and Washington Post, available at www.cepr.net. In part two of this article, which will appear in the next issue, he will outline and elaborate on the "big solutions."

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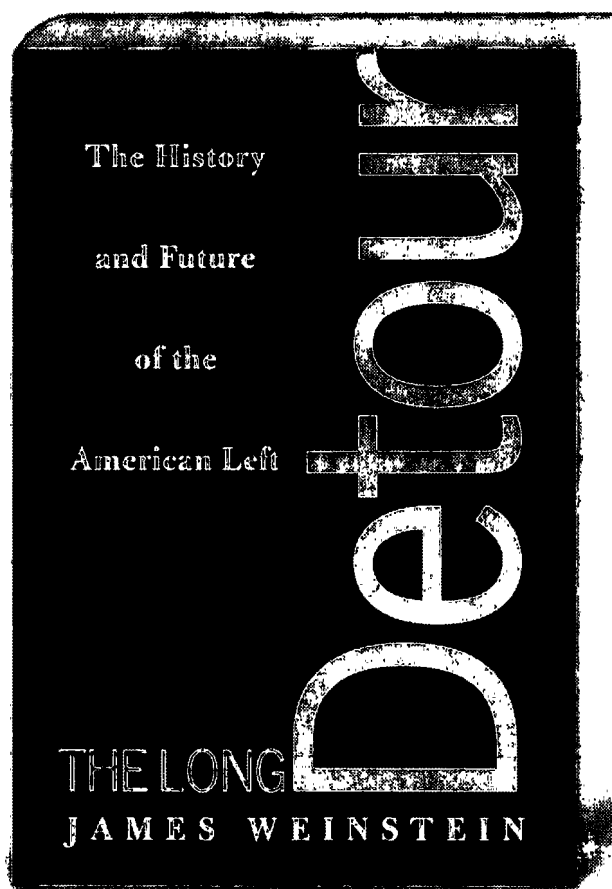
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WHAT'S NEXT?

Across the country, legions of newly motivated anti-war activists now turn ... to what?

By Geov Parrish

In thousands of cities and towns, millions of people—many of them new to activism—marched, vigiled, prayed, lobbied. War on Iraq happened anyway. And many Americans judged the war to be successful.

In 1991 a similar scenario led to discouragement and dropping out. Bill Clinton defeated George Bush I the following year despite, not because of, Bush's war record. The months and years after Clinton's elections were the darkest days since the '50s for many organized peace groups. There was virtually no activist carryover from the momentum of the first Gulf War.

2003 promises to be different. Comparisons between 1991 and 2003 suggests that despite the emotional burden of having watched a war unfold over their objections, and as polls register solid and increasing pro-war sentiment, more among this generation of peace activists will be in it for the long haul. Activism itself has changed; with the Internet, activists are much more aware of and connected to each other and to the rest of the world.

Unlike the first Gulf War, America's military strike was and has remained unpopular in almost every other country in the world. In Europe, in East Asia, in Latin America—not to mention the entire Muslim world—anti-American and anti-war sentiment actually increased during the war, as each day their media showed the disconnect between military pronouncements and the reality of what was unfolding, in a way not apparent in the United States itself.

Outside our borders, skepticism of future American military aims is nearly universal.

The perception of those aims, of course, is the biggest difference. The 1991 effort to liberate Kuwait was presented as a reactive police measure; it came at a time when the end of the Cold War was seen to pose an opportunity for long-overdue global peace, not a threat of unilateral superpower invasions. But this time, although some in the Bush administration are insisting that Iraq is *sui generis* and the U.S. focus will now be on Middle East peace and rebuilding Iraq, any number of others, including the neocons Bush seems to have cast his lot with, are very loudly debating who, not what, should be next.

The bid to topple Saddam came in the framework of an endless "war on terror" that concerns many not only for its military aggressiveness but for its domestic components as well. There are other ominous war clouds: Hawks whose now-public rhapsodies on the global benefits of American Empire envision an endless military campaign for global hegemony with or without any war on terror; war-induced humanitarian and reconstruction issues in Iraq; and the reality of continuing field combat action by U.S. armed forces in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Philippines and—despite Bush's declaration of "victory"—Iraq itself. New activists have no shortage of reasons to continue agitating.

The other major difference between the protesters of Gulf Wars I and II is demographics. A number of the reasons for opposing Dubya's invasion concerned not just peaceniks, but people who were neither reflexively anti-military nor anti-Bush. They were skeptical of the disingenuousness of the Bush administration's shifting rationales; the lack of an imminent threat to U.S. security; global disapproval (as epitomized in the U.N. Security Council); and the doctrines of "pre-emptive" invasion and unilateral "regime change." The demographics of those attending public protests were broader, and often older and less counter-cultural, than the politics from the stage. Such trends may favor more of war's opponents having a long-term perspective and commitment.

The ad hoc coalitions and local groups that have mushroomed in recent months now face the rocky prospect of connecting with or transforming themselves into groups equipped for the longer haul. It is a task of shifting from emergency responses to measured ones, from decrying public policies to attempting to change them, from battling political power to wielding it. It's also a task of recognizing that, far from failing, America's peace movement over the past several months had an enormous impact, even though it had virtually no existing organization, few champions among politicians or mass media, and faced staggering political odds.

Along with the global peace movement, its domestic counterpart was instrumental in forcing the Bush administration to deal with the United Nations; allowing even small, aid-dependent countries to stand up to U.S. diplomatic bullying, bribes and threats; and, finally, forcing the United States and Britain to wage their war in nearly complete global isolation. Even more significantly, global and domestic opinion helped force Bush to go from "shock and awe" tactics to genuine efforts—though neither were uniformly applied nor uniformly successful—to avoid civilian casualties. Without the domestic and worldwide peace movements, many, many more Iraqi civilians may have died.

A lot of the criticism that's been leveled at the peace movement is that it's too negative," says Scott Lynch, a spokesperson for Peace Action. Lynch's group has already identified three major planks to focus on for shifting U.S. foreign policy: reducing weapons of mass destruction, greater international cooperation, and a greater emphasis on human rights and democracy, particularly regarding the arms trade. Peace Action is also cooperating with TomPaine.com, TrueMajority.org and Rock the Vote on a drive to conduct voter registration among peace activists.

Groups like Win Without War have already involved a variety of progressive constituents: the Sierra Club, NOW, religious leaders and some facets of organized labor. United for Peace and Justice, another of the broad coalitions that came together in recent months to oppose the invasion, is hosting constituent groups in a June conference in Chicago to discuss future directions and group efforts. Lynch envisions a broader effort among progressive activists of all types: "If they don't work together, not only will Republicans remain in office, but it tends to suck all the oxygen out of the air, and money out of the budget. ... They have to be invested in addressing foreign policy, because Republicans can use it as a large stick to beat down a lot of the domestic issues."

At the local level—where cities, counties and every one of the 50 states face urgent budget crises caused in part by federal cutbacks and economic policies—the link between military spending and domestic priorities is receiving a lot of attention. "There is bound to be another military action of one sort or another, because Iraq was part of a larger war for hegemony and effort to control resources," says Tim Kingston of Global Exchange. "Any sort of peace campaign that is pro-education or pro-public health has to be bound up with foreign policy, because so many resources are going into the military and tax cuts."

But Kingston doesn't see a mass return to the pre-9/11 focus on global trade groups like the WTO and IMF: "Where that was previously focused on rulemakers, it's now on ending the war." For their part, Global Exchange and Rainforest Action Network—both of whom have histories of direct action rather than lobbying—are preparing to launch a post-invasion corporate accountability campaign, demanding that major automakers dramatically raise fuel efficiency standards. (Taking the notion further, a recent *Earth First! Journal* cover proclaimed, "No Blood OR Oil!")

Beyond all the issues, an election looms. Even though Lynch touts Peace Action's own work as having appeal beyond its progressive base, he has a narrower ambition for 2004. "We want to reach out to the natural constituencies

The global peace movement helped small, aid-dependent countries stand up to U.S. diplomatic bullying, and forced Bush and Blair to wage their war in nearly total global isolation.

of the Democrats," he says of Peace Action's voter registration effort. "Democrats haven't been doing their jobs. We want to build a large, progressive-left coalition."

Most opponents of war—whether they are focused on electoral politics or not—had no connection before last fall with organized progressive institutions, and most still don't, in their own communities or nationally. Given the American media's relentless pandering to Washington's status quo, and how Bush continually plays to the public's fears—and pursues policies that actually do increase security threats to ordinary Americans—activists, new and old, can still find themselves feeling isolated and powerless. Convincing individuals that they can make a difference is crucial to stopping America's rightward slide.

The best way to ensure that the enormous groundswell of the past several months continues to grow in size and political power is to ensure that activists recognize their own power and focus anew on the urgent goals that await. Only by persisting do we have a chance to break the cycles of endless enemies, retaliations and deaths of ordinary people caught in the crossfire. And unless the permanent war that George W. Bush has launched is confronted by a permanent peace campaign, we, too, will all eventually be caught in that crossfire. ■

Operation Desert Mirage

Americans may have already forgotten about weapons of mass destruction, but the United Nations hasn't—and it's demanding answers

By Ian Williams

Faith moves mountains, hides weapons, and makes oil flow. At the beginning of May, the new viceroy of Iraq, retired Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, who seems to have recently resumed his military title, announced that the shortage of gasoline in Iraq was the United Nations' fault. He said that continuing U.N. sanctions stopped supplies to the pumps in Baghdad.

Of course, until then, most of us not schooled in the new Republican reality had assumed that the purpose of U.N. sanctions was to stop Iraq exporting oil except under strictly regulated circumstances. So if the U.N. Oil for Food program was struggling to get moving again, this meant that there was less oil being exported, which should mean that there was more oil left behind in Iraq. But reality shimmers like a mirage in the growing desert heat. It is always the United Nations' fault.

Anyone else but this administration would blush when faced with the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. But it was fairly obvious that the White House was only kidding when it used that as the excuse to the United Nations for the invasion. Now, they genuinely seem unembarrassed when they ask the Security Council to give validation to their conquest, which was allegedly carried out in support of the United Nations, in search of weapons that they alleged were definitely there, and which the allegedly conniving and inefficient U.N. weapons inspectors willfully would not find.

Or maybe the invasion was to force the Iraqis to cooperate properly with the weapons inspectors. Certainly Washington is now refusing to let the weapons inspectors return to Iraq—possibly because they had proved their inefficiency by not finding the weapons that a quarter of a million heavily armed allies have also failed to find. Even the British at the United Nations agree that no one will believe an allied "discovery" of weapons in Iraq unless it is koshered by U.N. inspectors. When Bush says the weapons "will be found," it does sound almost as much like an order as a prophecy.

But then, no one has found Osama bin Laden in Baghdad; indeed, they cannot find Saddam Hussein in Baghdad either. If ordinary Fox News viewers scratched their medium-term memory, this could worry them, since this was part of the war against terrorism and payback time for 9/11.

Or was the war really for democracy? Well, up to a point. It appears that someone had forgotten that in chaotic conditions, well-organized faith-based groups, such as the neocons in Washington and the Shi'as in Iraq, tend to seize the day and take over, with unforeseen consequences, so democracy may need expedient reinterpretation.

Reality becomes blurred when we are presented with so many mutually contradictory excuses and abrupt turnarounds that George Orwell's 1984 seems positively optimistic. At least Big Brother cared enough about history to want to rewrite it. Looking at the TV treatment of the White House, they seem to be in a confident conspiracy that most people will not remember what was being said yesterday, let alone last year. History, no matter how recent, has been dropped into the memory hole of collective electronic amnesia, which is really ironic considering that with the Internet, it is easier than ever before to resurrect the buried misstatements of yestermoth.

However, while this black memory hole is expanding cancerously out from Washington, its event horizon is in New York, at the United Nations, where people seem to have longer memories. They recall that it was the United States that wanted Iraqi sanctions, and fought long and hard to maintain them until the U.N. weapons inspectors would give a clean bill of health to the country. They remember Washington's insistence on the Oil for Food revenues being under the close control of the United Nations. Indeed, even their short term memory seems to be intact: They remember the Blair-Bush declaration of a vital role for the United Nations in reconstruction, and that Iraqi oil was the property of the Iraqi people.

In this context, the French call for the suspension of sanctions, shortly after Bush had demanded their lifting, was actually very consistent. France had opposed sanctions for a long time. It is of course true that their motives were not totally unalloyed, and oil contracts for French companies helped boost their concern for the Iraqi population. The immediate cause for Bush's conversion was the belated realization that, while Washington sees the U.N. as nothing but a handy scapegoat and occasional excuse for war, the rest of the world takes the U.N., the rule of law, and indeed reality more seriously. No one will buy oil from Iraq without the U.N. lifting the sanctions, unless it is through the Oil for Food program. As long as that program is running, it gives leverage to the international community to put truth in Bush's promises about a vital role for the U.N.

The Pentagon seems to have beaten the State Department on this issue inside the White House, which is why Washington is now wallowing diplomatically in its attempts to get U.N. recognition and an end to sanctions. As the world has noticed, the Pentagon is not big on interactive diplomacy. But despite their bluster, the Americans still need the United Nations and the Oil for Food program, because no one else, not even Halliburton or Bechtel, has the expertise and means to feed the 60 percent of Iraqis who were totally dependent on it even before the disruption of war. Baghdad, in one of Saddam's few wise moves, distributed months of rations in anticipation of the war, but they will be running out soon. The program has outstanding contracts for commodities that Iraq needs, and for which the contractors need to be paid.

In addition, there is the ticklish problem of reparations. Despite all this guff about the oil being the property of the Iraqi people, currently a quarter of the revenue from sales goes into the trough where Kuwait and major corporations have been dipping their snouts for "reparations," on a scale unprecedented since the Treaty of Versailles laid the groundwork for World War II. Only last month, with a potential humanitarian crisis, U.S. delegates at the United Nations insisted that the current tranche of reparations had to be paid.

The Iranians have noticed the honeypot next door, and there are clamors in Tehran for a share of it. They have an excellent case. The resolution that ended the original Iraq-Iran war called for the United Nations to determine who was guilty of aggression. The U.N. report, which unsurprisingly found Iraq responsible, came out as reparations were being imposed on Iraq following the invasion of Kuwait. Since Kuwait—and the United States—helped Iraq in its war against Iran, it would be very unfair to pay reparations to Kuwait and not Iran.

In reality, of course, it is very unfair to make the people of Iraq collectively guilty for the sins of a regime that repressed and gassed them with the full support of both nations now at the core of the famous coalition. While reserving judgment on reparations to Kuwait, Washington has called for creditor countries to wipe the slate clean—at least when it comes to debts to countries like France and Russia. This is, of course, the opposite line to what it took in Nigeria, Congo, South Africa and, for that matter, Russia itself.

So while U.N. delegates have been very flexible about allowing the Oil for Food program to cooperate with the "authorities" in Iraq, the Security Council will not countenance any legitimization of the U.S. occupation. They may suspend the sanctions, but the final lifting will depend on the United States accommodating other countries' concerns. Those concerns range from nobly altruistic to sordidly self-interested, but the people who seek to bring democracy in one hand and Bechtel in the other can't really complain about that.

However, while most of the members of the Council are glad to see the end of Saddam Hussein, and may even be quietly amused at the hole in the sand the White House is digging for itself, they want to see a legitimate government in Iraq, and do not believe that the United States is capable of achieving that. They are equally concerned about trying to patch up the huge rent that the invasion tore in the fabric of international order.

That means that they would go a long way to overlook and legitimize this one, if they could be persuaded that it was a one-off. It is because of a mixture of this hope, and, to be honest, outright cowardice, that no country has yet put down a resolution at the General Assembly, nor indeed in the Security Council, condemning the invasion. The more they are persuaded that the United States will call a halt, the more they will be prepared to shove the Iraq invasion down their own collective memory hole.

But the Pentagon has hardly been on a winning-hearts-and-minds mission. It has been more of a head hunt. Following George W. Bush's amazing discovery that there are Baathists in Damascus, one fears the worst. Missing weapons will move, like the pea under the shell, from Iraq to Syria, to Iran to Libya or Cuba, wherever the neocons feel the need for regime change. ■

Strange Weather Lately

By Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

The following is adapted from a Clemens Lecture presented in April for the Mark Twain House in Hartford, Connecticut.

First things first: I want it clearly understood that this mustache I'm wearing is my father's mustache. I should have brought his photograph. My big brother Bernie, now dead, a physical chemist who discovered that silver iodide can sometimes make it snow or rain, he wore it, too.

Speaking of weather: Mark Twain said some readers complained that there wasn't enough weather in his stories. So he wrote some weather, which they could insert wherever they thought it would help some.

Mark Twain was said to have shed a tear of gratitude and incredulousness when honored for his writing by Oxford University in England. And I should shed a tear, surely, having been asked at the age of 80, and because of what I myself have written, to speak under the auspices of the sacred Mark Twain House here in Hartford.

What other American landmark is as sacred to me as the Mark Twain House? The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Mark Twain and Abraham Lincoln were country boys from Middle America, and both of them made the American people laugh at themselves and appreciate really important, really moral jokes.

I note that construction has stopped of a Mark Twain Museum here in Hartford—behind the carriage house of the Mark Twain House at 351 Farmington Avenue.

Work persons have been sent home from that site because American "conservatives," as they call themselves, on Wall Street and at the head of so many of our corporations, have stolen a major fraction of our private savings, have ruined investors and employees by means of fraud and outright piracy.

Shock and awe.

And now, having installed themselves as our federal government, or taken control of

it from outside, they have squandered our public treasury and then some. They have created a public debt of such appalling magnitude that our descendants, for whom we had such high hopes, will come into this world as poor as church mice.

Shock and awe.

What are the conservatives doing with all the money and power that used to belong to all of us? They are telling us to be absolutely terrified, and to run around in circles like chickens with their heads cut off. But they will save us. They are making us take off our shoes at airports. Can anybody here think of a more hilarious practical joke than that one?

Smile, America. You're on Candid Camera.

And they have turned loose a myriad of our high-tech weapons, each one

costing more than a hundred high schools, on a Third World country, in order to shock and awe human beings like us, like Adam and Eve, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

The other day I asked former Yankees pitcher Jim Bouton what he thought of our great victory over Iraq, and he said, "Mohammed Ali versus Mr. Rogers."

What are conservatives? They are people who will move heaven and earth, if they have to, who will ruin a company or a country or a planet, to prove to us and to themselves that they are superior to everybody else, except for their pals. They take good care of their pals, keep them out of jail—and so on.

Conservatives are crazy as bedbugs. They are bullies.

Shock and awe.

Class war? You bet.

They have proved their superiority to admirers of Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain and Jesus of Nazareth, with an able assist from television, making inconsequential our protests against their war.

What has happened to us? We have suffered a technological calamity. Television is now our form of government.

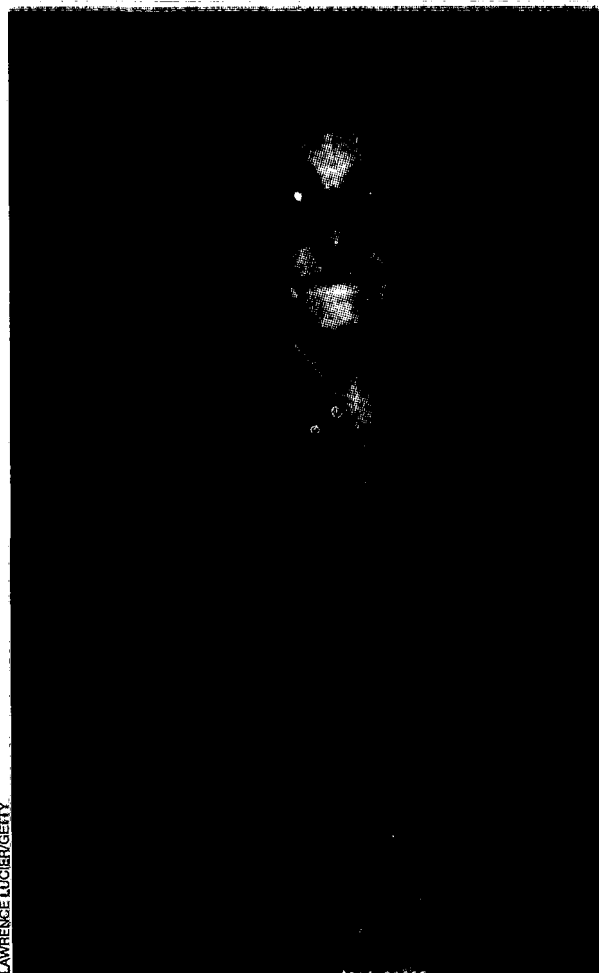
On what grounds did we protest their war? I could name many, but I need name only one, which is common sense.

Be that as it may, construction of the Mark Twain Museum will sooner or later be resumed. And I, the son and grandson of Indiana architects, seize this opportunity to suggest a feature which I hope will be included in the completed structure, words to be chiseled into the capstone over the main entrance.

Here is what I think would be fun to put up there, and Mark Twain loved fun more than anything. I have tinkered with something famous he said, which is: "Be good and you will be lonesome." That is from *Following the Equator*. OK?

So envision what a majestic front entrance the Mark Twain Museum will have someday. And imagine that these

LAWRENCE LUCIER/GETTY



words have been chiseled into the noble capstone and painted gold:

BE GOOD AND YOU WILL BE LONESOME
MOST PLACES, BUT NOT HERE, NOT HERE.

One of the most humiliated and heart-broken pieces Twain ever wrote was about the slaughter of 600 Moro men, women and children by our soldiers during our

**"Be good and you will
be lonesome."**

—Mark Twain

liberation of the people of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. Our brave commander was Leonard Wood, who now has a fort named after him. Fort Leonard Wood.

What did Abraham Lincoln have to say about such American imperialist wars? Those are wars which, on one noble pretext or another, actually aim to increase the natural resources and pools of tame labor available to the richest Americans who have the best political connections.

And it is almost always a mistake to men-

tion Abraham Lincoln in a speech about something or somebody else. He always steals the show. I am about to quote him.

Lincoln was only a Congressman when he said in 1848 what I am about to echo. He was heartbroken and humiliated by our war on Mexico, which had never attacked us.

We were making California our own, and a lot of other people and properties, and doing it as though butchering Mexican soldiers who were only defending their homeland against invaders wasn't murder.

What other stuff besides California? Well, Texas, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

The person congressman Lincoln had in mind when he said what he said was James Polk, our president at the time. Abraham Lincoln said of Polk, his president, our armed forces' commander-in-chief: "Trusting to escape scrutiny by fixing the public gaze upon the exceeding brightness of military glory, that attractive rainbow that rises in showers of blood—that serpent's eye, that charms to destroy, he plunged into war."

Holy smokes! I almost said, "Holy shit!"

And I thought I was a writer!

Do you know we actually captured Mexico City during the Mexican War? Why isn't that a national holiday? And why isn't the face of James Polk up on Mount Rushmore, along with Ronald Reagan's?

What made Mexico so evil back in the 1840s, well before our Civil War, is that slavery was illegal there. Remember the Alamo?

My great-grandfather's name was Clemens Vonnegut. Small world, small world. This piquant coincidence is not a fabrication. Clemens Vonnegut called himself a "freethinker," an antique word for humanist. He was a hardware merchant in Indianapolis.

So, 120 years ago, say, there was one man who was both Clemens and Vonnegut. I would have liked being such a person a lot. I only wish I could have been such a person tonight.

I claim no blood relationship with Samuel Clemens of Hannibal, Missouri. "Clemens," as a first name, is, I believe, like the name "Clementine," derived from the adjective "clement." To be clement is to be lenient and compassionate, or, in the case of weather, perfectly heavenly.

So there's weather again. ■

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How Much Democracy Is Too Much?

By Slavoj Žižek

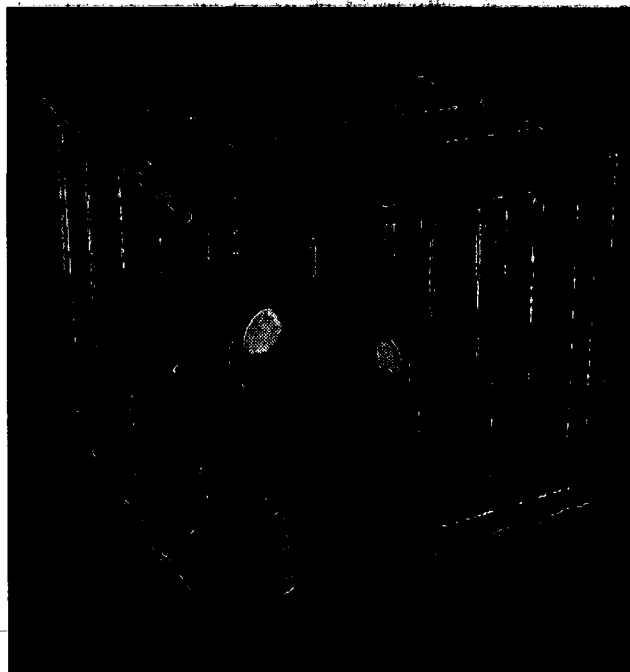
Democracy is not merely the “power of, by, and for the people.” It is not enough just to claim that, in democracy, the will and the interests (the two in no way automatically coincide) of the large majority determine state decisions. Democracy—in the way the term is used today—concerns, above all, formal legalism. Its minimal definition is the unconditional adherence to a certain set of formal rules which guarantee that antagonisms are fully absorbed into the “rules of the game.”

“Democracy” means that, whatever electoral manipulation actually takes place, every political agent will unconditionally respect the results. In this sense, the U.S. presidential elections of 2000 were effectively “democratic.” Despite obvious and patent electoral manipulations in Florida, the Democratic candidate accepted his defeat. In the weeks of uncertainty after the elections, Bill Clinton made an appropriately acerbic comment: “The American people have spoken. We just don’t know what they said.” This comment should have been taken more seriously than it was meant, for it revealed how the present machinery of democracy can be problematic, to say the least. Why should the left always and unconditionally respect the formal “rules of the game”? Why should it not, in some circumstances, put in question the legitimacy of the outcome of a formal democratic procedure?

Alternatively, there is at least one case in which formal democrats themselves (or, at least, a substantial portion of them) would tolerate the suspension of democracy: What if formally free elections are won by an anti-democratic party whose platform promises the abolition of formal democracy? (This did happen, among other places, in Algeria a few years ago.) In such a case, many a democrat would concede that the people were not yet “mature” enough to be allowed democracy, and that some kind of

enlightened despotism whose aim is to educate the majority to become proper democrats is preferable.

Following this rhetorical line of attack, the gradual limitation of democracy is clearly perceptible in attempts to “rethink” the present situation in the aftermath of the Iraq war. One is, of course, for democracy and human rights, but one should “rethink” them. A series of recent interventions in the public debate give a clear sense of the direction of this “rethinking.” In *The Future of Freedom*, Fareed Zakaria, Bush’s favored columnist, locates the threat to freedom in “overdoing democracy,” i.e., in the rise of “illiberal democracy at home and abroad.” He draws the lesson that democracy can only “catch on” in economically developed countries: If developing countries are “prematurely democratized,” the result is a populism which ends in economic catastrophe and political despotism.



No wonder, goes this theory, that today’s economically most successful Third World countries (Taiwan, South Korea, Chile) embraced full democracy only after a period of authoritarian rule. The immediate lessons for Iraq are clear and unambiguous: Yes, the United States should bring democracy to Iraq, but not immedi-

ately. There should first be a period of five or so years in which a benevolently authoritarian, U.S.-controlled regime would create proper conditions for the effective

A democratic Iraq will probably want to sanction Israel, oppose free trade and resist oil privatization.

functioning of democracy. This regime will not tolerate, for example, a democratic desire to nationalize oil revenues, or to apply sanctions to Israel, or to refuse global free trade schemes. We know now what bringing democracy means: It means that the United States and its “willing partners” impose themselves as the ultimate judges who decide if and when a country is ripe for democracy.

As for the United States itself, Zakaria’s diagnosis is that “America is increasingly embracing a simple-minded populism that values popularity and openness as the key measures of legitimacy. ... The result is a deep imbalance in the American system, more democracy but less liberty.” The remedy is thus to counteract this excessive “democratization of democracy” by delegating more power to impartial experts insulated from the democratic fray, like the independent central banks.

Such a diagnosis cannot but provoke ironic laughter: Today, in this alleged “overdemocratization,” the United States and Britain started a war on Iraq against the overwhelming will of the rest of the planet (and, in Britain’s case, its own people). And are we not, all the time, witnessing the imposition of key decisions concerning global trade agreements by “impartial” bodies exempted from democratic control? Even more fundamentally, is it not ridiculous to complain about “overdemocratization” in a time when the key eco-

economic and geopolitical decisions are, as a rule, not an issue in elections? For at least the past three decades, what Zakaria demands is already fact. What we experience today are acrimonious splits over ideological lifestyle issues, where fierce debates rage and choices are solicited (on abortion, on gay marriages, etc.), but where basic economic policy is presented as a depoliticized domain of expert authority. The proliferation of "overdemocracy" with its "excesses" of a "culture of complaint" is ultimately the front whose backside is the silent, sturdy weaving of economic, corporatist logic.

The obverse of the same tendency to counteract democratic "excesses" is the open dismissal of any international body that would effectively control the conduct of war—which might, after all, be

necessary from time to time to enforce the economic agenda. Exemplary is Kenneth Anderson's recent *New York Times Magazine* essay, "Who Owns the Rules of War?" whose subtitle makes the point unambiguously clear: "The war in Iraq demands a rethinking of the international rules of conduct. The outcome could mean less power for neutral, well-meaning human rights groups and more for big-stick-wielding states. That would be a good thing."

The main complaint of this essay is that, "For the past 20 years, the center of gravity in establishing, interpreting and shaping the law of war has gradually shifted away from the military establishments of leading states and toward more activist and publicly aggressive NGOs." This tendency

is perceived as unbalanced, "unfair" toward the big military powers who intervene in other countries, and partial toward the attacked countries—with the clear conclusion that the militaries on the "big-stick-wielding states" should themselves determine the standards by which their actions will be judged.

This conclusion is indeed consistent with the U.S. rejection of the authority of the International Criminal Court over its citizens. And it spells out a bitter reality: that a new dark age is descending upon the human race. ■

Slavoj Žižek, a philosopher and psychoanalyst, is a senior researcher at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, in Essen, Germany.

Supply and Demand

By Ana Carrigan

Robin Kirk's thoughtful and provocative book about Colombia, *More Terrible Than Death*, raises long overdue questions about America's shared responsibility for that country's descent into chaos. Kirk, who has spent 10 years documenting Colombia's catastrophic human rights situation for Human Rights Watch, does not argue that the United States is responsible for all Colombia's ills. But her assertion that Washington's "single-minded focus on eliminating drugs at the source" has

words to say the opposite of what they mean. (How many times have we heard that the billions of dollars in U.S. military aid for the Colombian army are necessary to "preserve that country's democracy and support human rights"?) By now, we believe we know who is responsible for Colombia's mayhem: All the havoc is the fault of the FARC guerrillas; or the paramilitaries; or the elites; or the army; or the drug traffickers. It has nothing to do with us.

Yet the big picture, the beauty of the country, the diversity and richness of its culture, the intelligence of its people and their extraordinary capacity for recuperation, these elude us. It is hard to care about a place we don't understand, particularly when our only images are the interminably familiar ones of destruction and death. Faced with a humanitarian catastrophe on a scale hitherto unknown on this continent, we retreat into catch-all myths: Colombia, we say, suffers from a "culture of violence"; "Colombians are incapable, or unwilling, to staunch the blood-letting"; Colombian history, it seems, has been marooned interminably in a cyclical, tropical bloodbath. Unable to find any good guys to root for, we have long ago told ourselves that the complexities and contradictions of Colombia's overlap-

ping wars are too difficult to decipher. Convinced that Colombia is hopeless, we have ceased to care.

But Robin Kirk has mapped the connections that link Americans' \$46 billion-a-year spending spree on cocaine and heroin to the monumental fraud of Washington's 20-year-old war on drugs, and to the cash that flows straight into guns and paychecks for the killers in Colombia. She challenges us to wake up and acknowledge our responsibility. "The point of this book," she writes, "is to lay bare the context of what lies behind and within America's war on drugs in Colombia and show how the United States, through its consumer habits and official policies, has provoked Colombia's home-grown demons. ... What looms in Colombia is more than a familiar tale of Latin corruption and savagery. ... We watch as if it had nothing, really, to do with us. Yet it does, intimately. Our failed policy—dramatically failed, epically failed, and failing with a numbing, annual frequency—is largely responsible."

Colombians, in other words, have not made the long journey into today's bloody morass on their own. Tracing the origins of U.S. intervention in Colombia, she resurrects the history of Washington's first involvement, triggered when an enraged Bogotá mob torched official buildings in the aftermath of the 1948 assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. All it took to draw Washington into the middle of the local rivalry between those whom Kirk describes as the "Capulets and

**More Terrible Than Death:
Massacres, Drugs and America's War
in Colombia**

By Robin Kirk

PublicAffairs

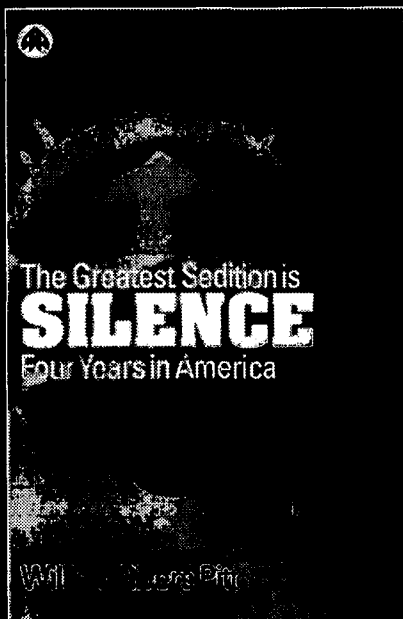
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fueled, expanded and exacerbated Colombia's spiraling brutality is based on factual observations on the ground and intimate knowledge of the ways both governments—in Washington and Bogotá—give the runaround to human rights rules intended to protect civilians.

We know the facts about Colombia's tragedy—or we think we do. We've been exposed to numbingly repetitive horror stories, inundated by statistics, debates and official statements that use

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Montagues of the Andes," was for the Conservative president of the day to charge that "a movement of communist inspiration and practices" had inspired the rioters. Overnight, a chaotic and leaderless insurrection in Bogotá had morphed, in American eyes, into the latest sinister example of Russian ambitions to export world revolution. In the days that followed, the pattern of American military support for compliant Colombian leaders took shape.

Ancient history? Colombia's leaders have been mining American security obsessions to gain Washington's military largesse ever since. In 1990, when a 40-year-old insurgency was recast from the Cold War mold to the drug war, the fighting didn't miss a beat. Suddenly, Kirk recalls, the word "narco-guerrilla" was everywhere, "a magic spell that would ease millions out of the American treasury." In 55 years, only the language changes: "Marxist guerrilla," "narco-guerrilla," or "narco-terrorist," it's still the same FARC. "Without the American obsession," Kirk asks, "would there have been a FARC? An Escobar? A Mapiripan?" The question is rhetorical, but it opens a creative space for some new thinking.

In her work for Human Rights Watch, Kirk's meticulously factual human rights reports consistently provided a credible source of information for other writers and reporters. Now, Kirk has finally written about her own emotional and intellectual journey during those years. Set against the backdrop of recent Colombian history, she combines personal reflections with the profiles of friends and public figures whose lives reflect the larger issues of war, poverty and drugs that are tearing Colombian society apart. Kirk excels in these portraits. A case in point is her profile of the early career of the man she insists on calling by his real name—Pedro Marin. Marin is none other than the 70-year-old leader of the FARC, whom the world knows only by his *nom de guerre*, "Manuel Marulanda"—or, sometimes, "Tiro Fijo," "Sure Shot." Kirk has given Marin back his complexity and humanity; a rare achievement and an essential one if we ever hope to understand his country's history.

It is the stories of Kirk's anonymous colleagues and friends, however, that bring us closer to the fragility of life in a society

teetering at the edge. These ordinary Colombian citizens, trying to live ordinary, everyday lives, in ordinary places, can never know at what moment an abyss will open at their feet. As we get to know their stories, woven into the larger narrative of their nation, we realize that they are trapped on a path that leads, unerringly, into fatal collision with the impact of U.S. drug policies on Colombian lives.

And then there is Josue.

Josue Giraldo Cardona is a provincial lawyer. He is married and he has two young daughters. Josue loves his family. He loves his life, and he lives it to the full. He loves his country. Though he has traveled and has influence and friends abroad, Josue cannot imagine living anywhere else on this planet. Josue is an idealist. He is an optimist. He believes change is possible in Colombia, and he will not stop trying to make that change happen. He cannot stop. Josue cannot live without hope. "Josue had his own opinions about why Colombians fight," Kirk explains. "This was it: Colombians do not believe that another way is possible, that life can be different. It was a lack of imagination. It was the absence of faith. You had to believe, as Josue did, that something else was possible on the earth, at the precise place where he had been born and raised, which he believed to be the most beautiful spot life offered. If someone or many someones stand up and point to another path, and convince others, then perhaps change is possible."

Josue is dead now. Like all the murders in Colombia, Josue's was a death foretold. Death in Colombia is never senseless, nor random. There is always a reason, always logic, behind each death, and Josue knew he was going to die and why. Josue was killed because he was working for peace and justice, and because he never stopped believing that a new and different Colombia was possible. Josue knew what he would need to do to escape his death. Most of the time, when the death threats start, Colombians have time to leave the country and go into exile. Kirk tried to persuade Josue to take that route, but he would not. He had made his choice. He had decided that death was not the most terrible thing. Giving up, living without hope—that, Josue told Robin Kirk, frightened him more.

Josue's spirit haunts Kirk's writing. With his help, she has transcended the

North-South, Anglo-Latino cultural barrier to come closer than any other American writer to Colombia's complex, seductive and paradoxical reality. Kirk might be describing her own experience when she writes of an American colleague: "[He] had been infected by the passion that seizes many who visit, seduced by Colombia's beauty, the intelligence of its people, and their sense of fun and life

in the midst of so much death. Rumba and death, joy and the end of days."

It is impossible to read this book and come away with one's view of Colombia unchanged. ■

Ana Carrigan frequently reports from Colombia for In These Times. Among other books, she is the author of The Palace of Justice: A Colombian Tragedy.

You Call This Victory?

By Ian Williams

Dilip Hiro has written many books about the Middle East, but none as timely as this. *Iraq: In the Eye of the Storm* comes out too late for the edification of White House hawks, but in

Iraq: In the Eye of the Storm

By Dilip Hiro

Nation Books/Thunder's Mouth Press
272 pages, \$12.95

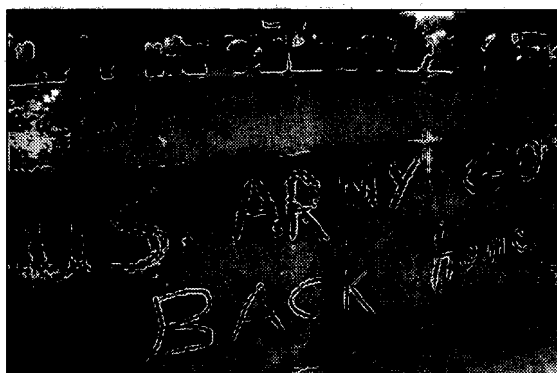
time for the rest of us to take a cool look at "victory" and why it is likely to be messily Pyrrhic for the seeming winners.

Objective as he is, Hiro is not a member of the Saddam Hussein fan club, and he demonstrates clearly why the Iraqi dictator is every bit as evil and tyrannical now as he had been when he was the favored Arab tyrant of Britain and the United States. No one who had read Hiro's book would be surprised at the ambivalent reception the allies are getting in Iraq. Hiro points out how the sanctions and the oil-for-food regime had made almost every Iraqi household totally dependent on government-controlled handouts, which helps account for their lack of enthusiasm for the troops—although, of course, the secret police and the prisons helped. Hiro, unlike the reporters embedded in the White House and State Department, also reminds us of the fate of the Iraqis foolish enough to listen to American calls to rise up in the previous Gulf War. The combination of sanctions and complete betrayal helps explain why Iraqis are not quite as jubilant about their new masters as the neocons would have us believe.

Hiro quotes Gen. Anthony Zinni's prescient warning to Clinton, when the

latter was torn between effecting a regime change and bombing Iraqis into defiance, "any attempt to remove the Iraqi leader by force could dangerously fragment Iraq and destabilize the whole region." The instability is now there, although admittedly, the Bush-Blair team do seem to have stumbled across the magic formula to unite the fissiparous country that they have seized. However, one must doubt whether they really had joint Shi'a-Sunni anti-American demonstrations in mind when they first plotted the invasion.

If I have a minor quibble with this book, it is that Hiro gives Saddam Hussein too much credit when he calls him "always sensitive to Palestinians and their cause." As with his expedient Islam, Saddam was indeed sensitive to the political uses of the



Palestinian cause. But there were credible reports of the cynical contacts that his regime, as a worthy student of Stalin, had with Israel to take in Palestinian refugees in return for an end to sanctions.

But despite the Iraqi leader's clumsiness in gauging the international community, as demonstrated with his invasion of Kuwait, Hiro passes what I consider

almost a litmus test for objectivity about Iraq. He does not see the famous conversation from U.S. *chargé d'affaires* April Glaspie with Saddam Hussein as a cunning American plot to lure innocent Saddam into battle. Rather it was stupidity on both sides: The Americans, not for the first time, did not truly, deeply and sincerely appreciate that their best friend in the war with Iran was in fact a psychopath, and the psychopath himself did not realize that Glaspie's statement that the United States did not take sides on the issues between Kuwait and Iraq was not a green light to invade.

Hiro shows how the Palestine-Israel issue has been central to politics in the region almost from the time the Hashemites set up their standards in Baghdad. Washington has never been able to grasp the importance of this issue, and has assumed that it is an issue fomented by Arab rulers, rather than one that they have used to maintain power. With the strong bond of pan-Arabism, the region's people identify with the Palestinians even more strongly than Africans did with black South Africans under apartheid.

Tony Blair and Colin Powell at least have some grasp of this, which is why they should not be too surprised at the outcome when the famous "road map" for peace runs into the Israeli wall around the Palestinian bantustans, and the naïve expectations of Washington that a new regime in Iraq will kiss and make up with Ariel Sharon are dashed to the stony Levantine rocks. Clinton's team had closer ties to reality. They did not push for democracy in the Middle East, since they knew that any elected governments there would be more firmly opposed to Israeli policies than the more biddable kleptocracies.

More worldly-wise, Hiro concludes with a mention of the concept of "an eye for an eye" as "an integral part of the tribal culture that runs deep among Iraqis." The United States may have used smart bombs, but they were not as smart as they thought, and the trigger-happy GIs who have been shooting up civilians are even less smart. There are a lot of eyes waiting on account. As the hawks in Washington are beginning to discover, one of the oldest fairy tale curses is getting what you wish for. They got their regime change and their invasion. Watch them suffer. ■

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Continued from back cover

beat his cursed addiction. He climbed the 12 steps more times than Stallone climbed those steps in *Rocky*.

Though I deeply loved my brother and miss him terribly now that he is dead, I could not deny the damage, even in his long periods of sobriety, that alcohol did to him. Rather, I could not deny the damage, and I could not bear to watch it happen. I could feel it in my bones that he was up against something stronger than his will and his prodigious intellect. Stinking thinking, like kudzu, simply overtook his mind, and alcohol killed his body.

It is worth reflecting on George W. Bush's academic history. He graduated from two of the finest institutions of higher learning in this country: Yale and Harvard. He didn't make great grades, but he graduated, an accomplishment warranting some respect. Many rich, well-connected boys have flunked out.

The question is then begged, and seems to at least deserve some pause for pondering: How did he, at age 56, get so fumble-tongued, incapable of coherently stringing more than two sentences together, snippily irritable with anyone who dares disagree with him or even ask a question, and pointedly ignoring the diminutive, 82-year-old Helen Thomas at White House press conferences (the paltry few he attends) because she wrote unfavorably, and truthfully, of him? How did he poutily turn his back on the democratically elected president of one of our most important allies (Germany's Gerhard Schröder) because of something one of his underlings said about him? Why is he listlessly in need of constant vacations and rest, dangerously obsessed with only one thing (Iraq's apparently nonexistent weapons of mass destruction, which must mean that it really was, all along, about the oil) to the exclusion of all other things (including an economy that is

slowly sucking the life from the nation as well as trashing the retirement savings of anyone reading these words)?

Why is Bush so eager to engage in violence and so incapable of explaining why?

For drunks to function for any length of time in the world, they need enablers. Congress is filling that bill splendidly right now for Bush, and has been since January 2001, in fact. As *BuzzFlash* (www.buzzflash.com) put it about the corporate scandals, "For most of his adult life, those people around him enabled Bush's alcoholism. Now the Democratic Senate is enabling the corporate corruption problem of his administration by not using their Constitutional powers to demand the truth."

Not only Congress but the nation seems to be watching this happen. No—the American people, knowingly or not, are encouraging it to happen. Who knows, maybe we are all in shock, just as we are when a member of our family does something appalling or outrageous under alcohol's bidding. The crazy behavior by the administration is so wild and unprecedented, so unchecked and unbalanced and covering such frightening unknown territory up ahead, that it may be easier to look away.

But we can't look away. George W. Bush needs an intervention. Let's be his interveners. Let's raise our sober voices. Let's ask questions, demand more than temper tantrums and pouting from the commander-in-chief. Let's do this before it's too late, and a dry drunk's dream of glory becomes our national nightmare. ■

Alan Bisbort is a columnist for the *Hartford Advocate* and *American Politics Journal* (www.americanpolitics.com), where a different version of this piece first appeared.

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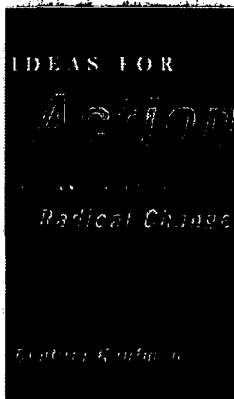


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Dry DRUNK

By Alan Bisbort

Alcoholics Anonymous has a name for someone who is a drunk in every way except for the actual imbibing of spirits. They call that person a "dry drunk." This is not a judgmental term, nor should this be a judgmental topic in America, where there are, by even the most conservative estimates, 10 million adult alcoholics, and very few families that have not been touched, in one way or another, by this national scourge. This same scourge has, by his own admission, also touched the life of our commander-in-chief.

Whether George W. Bush is or was an alcoholic is not the point here. I am taking him at his word that he stopped what he termed "heavy drinking" in 1986, at age 40. The point here is that, based on Bush's recent behavior—his obsessive push for war with Iraq, his chest-thumping warning to other "rogue nations" of similar one-sided punishments, his adolescent, vengeful tone with those former allies that chose not to participate in the "coalition of the willing," even his silly stunt of landing a jet on an aircraft carrier to prematurely declare, at the snap of his fingers (because he says it's so) that the war in Iraq is over—he could very well be a "dry drunk." Of course, he may just be an immature bully who will gladly sacrifice thousands of lives to get his way even against the advice of the most respected and mature members of his own party.

Still, Bush's past battles with the bottle are worth pondering at a time like this, one of the most dangerous in the nation's history. When a recovering alcoholic begins to engage in what AA calls "stinking thinking," he or she begins to exhibit the old attitudes and pathologies of their drinking years. These include an increase in anxiety, mild tremors, mild depression, disturbed sleep patterns, inability to think clearly, craving for junk food, irritability, sudden bursts of anger and unpredictable mood swings. According to AA literature, "Boredom and listlessness may alternate with intense feelings of resentment against family and friends, and explosive outbursts of violence."

Bush said he was a "heavy drinker." But let's not be coy here. Anyone who has ever imbibed heavily over a long period of time knows that "heavy drinker" is the rich man's (or the politician's) code for alcoholic.

For the record, Bush claims to have stopped drinking for reasons that change each time he's asked about his substance-abusing past

Is Bush crying out for help?

(which isn't often, thanks to a cowed press). Let's say he started experimenting with alcohol, as per the national norm, at age 16 in prep school, and he began getting regularly wasted at Yale at age 18. This would mean that Bush drank "heavily" for at least 22 years. We are, then, asked to believe that he went cold turkey after more than two decades of heavy drinking, a nearly impossible feat even for someone, as he claims, who was rescued by God.

Far be it from me to cast stones when it comes to alcohol. I've seen the devastating toll alcoholism can take. My brother was an honors student in college when he began drinking heavily (party drinking, as was the tradition at southern colleges back then). By the time he was in his mid-30s, real and dramatic changes had occurred in his metabolism and brain chemistry. Medical experts told me at the time that just 15 years of sustained drinking can do irreversible physical harm of this sort. In other words, even if my brother stopped drinking, the damage would remain. But by most measuring sticks, my brother was a functioning member of society. He held jobs, paid his rent and bills, and made heroic efforts to

Continued on page 29

